



JESUS

THE TRANSFORMER

Table of Contents

Dedication	3
1. Transformation	4
2. Abel (perfect sacrifice)	10
3. Saving Rahab (faith)	16
4. Nicodemus (Born again).....	22
5. A child (Citizen of the Kingdom).....	28
6. Robber on the Cross (death bed repentance)	34
7. Damascus Road (apocalypse).....	42
8. Moses (fear to fearless)	48
9. Rachel (loving the Saints).....	54
10. Peter (disciple in the making).	60
11. Peter (fisher of Men).....	65
12. Peter (Rock to rubble).....	71
13. Peter (in denial).....	76
14. Peter (the other side of the Cross).....	82
15. Peter (the pastor).....	87
16. Peter (leading the Apostles).....	92
17. Peter's epitaph.....	99
18. Spiritual unity	104
19. Spiritual transformations	110
20. Baptism with the Holy Spirit.	116
21. Joseph (prepared for greatness).....	123
22. Josiah (reformer of the heart).....	128
23. Bathsheba (King maker).	134
24. What has God done for you?	140
25. Encounters that Transform	147
26. Bringing up babies.....	153
27. Transforming to God's will.....	159
28. Gideon to Jerub-Baal.....	165
29. Samson, a warning from history.	171
30. Ruth (God's widow).	177

31.	The Jailor (break in to break out).....	183
32.	Mary (the burden of service).	189
33.	Zacchaeus (poacher to gamekeeper).....	195
34.	Mary Magdalēnē, apostle to the apostles.	201
35.	Lost and found, a wayward son's journey.	207
36.	Evangeline, the woman at Sychar.....	213
37.	We are not alone in the race.	219
38.	Why no transformations?	225
39.	All Good things come to a beginning.	231

Where Bible version is not stated it is the Authorised Version, otherwise:

- CEV Contemporary English Version
- Darby John Nelson Darby Translation
- ERV Easy to Read Version
- Geneva 1587 Version
- GNB Good News Translation
- GW God's Word
- ISV International Standard Version
- KJV Kings James Version
- LEB Lexham English Version
- LITV Literal Translation of the Holy Bible
- LXX Septuagint
- RSV Revised Standard Version
- YLT Young's Literal Translation

Scripture quotations are in *italic script*. All versions can be found in e-Sword

Blessings upon Rick Meyers for e-Sword <http://www.e-sword.net/> Please send him a contribution if you have not already.

Dedication

To the Saints,

Rom 12:2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

This verse would be better transliterated, “be metamorphosed by the renewing of you mind”. There are many changes that occur when Jesus enters into our lives and as Salvation outworks in our lives. *2Co 3:18 And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.* ESV. A life that does not change is not a life that has been redeemed.

This series examines the many changes that occur in us, seen through the lens of the lives of those who have gone before us. Yet it is not us but **Jesus who is the Transformer**.

Charles Wesley wrote a hymn that looked to the culmination of all of those transformations.

Changed from glory into glory,
Till in heav'n we take our place,
Till we cast our crowns before thee,
Lost in wonder, love and praise.

These ministries are by the Grace of God dedicated to our local family in Christ and His and our wider family around the world, with the hope that they and others will be encouraged by them.

Special thanks to my wife Diana who has encouraged my thinking and writing and proofing this version. Any mistakes are mine.

Love in Jesus,

Mike.

27th December 2017

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1. Transformation

This new series aims to explore how Jesus transforms us. To understand this we shall be looking at many of the lives of the Biblical Saints.

There was a day in my life when I crossed a line. There was a specific time that I got on my knees and asked God for forgiveness, asked Christ into my life and as I thought and felt, became a Christian. It was 9:00pm on Sunday 3rd January 1971 that I made a commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord of my life. I experienced the forgiveness of sin as a personal revelation and it was no longer something objective, something others had written about. It was subjective, a personal experience inside of me.

That change did not occur in isolation, yet it was not the result of an evangelistic sermon or a human request to 'give myself to Jesus'. It came after years of religious interest, searching, Church going, studying, trying to understand what Christianity was, arguing and questioning what various people presented to me as truth. It was a search for "God" and it was clear that there were many opinions, many different beliefs and many ways that people expressed what they would have called, "their relationship with God".

I could possibly take my journey even further back in time, to the Sunday School of my youth, to the religious education in my junior and senior school. Also there was the exposure to the major religious festivals of Easter and Christmas, days that were once observed nationally and even the news broadcasts were preceded by a hymn in those days. There were daily religious radio broadcasts before you went to school in the morning and sometimes one in the afternoon. It all worked to shape a particular religious viewpoint in me.

If you had asked me to explain what had happened to me on that Sunday evening, all those years ago, I could not have said much about it, other than that I had been 'saved' or 'converted'. I would have also used the phrase 'born again' although I could not explain what that really entailed at that time. I could not have given you chapter and verse to confirm that what I had experienced was to be expected of someone trusting in Christ. What I do know, is that a change occurred and that it was the most important change that had ever happened to me.

Added to that experience of 'conversion', there was a change in my outlook, attitude and understanding. The most remarkable change was the fact that the Bible was now an open book to me. By this I mean that in time past it had been a dry, lifeless and difficult book to read and very hard to understand. Now, it had been opened up, it was alive and more than that, it was speaking to me and my life. It was now both real and relevant and I was consumed with the desire to know more of the Word.

I had arrived at another place, an important place, another juncture on my journey of life. Certainly, as I look back over my Christian life, over forty years now, I would say that in my estimation, I am more a Christian now than then. I shudder when I recall the way that I behaved at times, the hypocrisy, the deceptions, and self-righteousness that I projected as Christianity. If I had died then, would I have gone to glory?

How is it that someone who claims to have undergone such a profound change, like me, continued to do bad things? I was not alone. I found in the Bible that there were people just like that, who had a relationship with their Creator and did some terrible things. There was a man who broke half of

the commands in one act. He coveted, stole, lied, fornicated and murdered. That was King David. Then there were those characters put up as examples of the faith in Hebrews chapter 11, a murderer, an ex-prostitute, a drunk, a serial cheat, a serial womaniser, and men who had difficulty in accepting God's word. Confusing? Yes, it certainly was. How could these people be examples of Christianity and behave so badly? How could these people possibly be an example for me? There must have been a profound change, a transformation, an overcoming of these things in their lives so that they could be examples of faith to us.

We must of course define Christianity and what is expected of a Christian. Simply stated, the religion called Christianity is a message from God. It is a message that calls for a response, a message contained in what we call "The Gospel" or good news. Central to that Gospel is the person of Jesus Christ and His atoning death. This is beautifully compacted into a statement in the letter to the Corinthians, a veritable Creed and a Catechism, *1Co 15:1 Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; 1Co 15:2 By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. 1Co 15:3 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; 1Co 15:4 And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: 1Co 15:5 And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: 1Co 15:6 After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. 1Co 15:7 After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. 1Co 15:8 And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.*

Therein is the core of Christian belief. That message has the ability to transform lives, save lives and the nature of that transformation will depend on how it is received. The parable of the 'Sower' explains what happens. *Mar 4:14 The sower soweth the word. Mar 4:15 And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts. Mar 4:16 And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness; Mar 4:17 And have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended. Mar 4:18 And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word, Mar 4:19 And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful. Mar 4:20 And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred.* This parable explains that there are essentially three responses to the Gospel:

1. It does not take root and is rejected,
2. It roots but becomes choked and dies,
3. It roots and becomes fruitful.

The effect of the Gospel varies considerably and we cannot always predict the outcome. I can say that I have seen all of these responses. It has also been extremely sad to see people who made a joyful profession of faith wither away and reject Christ altogether.

Christianity clearly has an intellectual element through the Word of God but it is not a mere acceptance of a set of profound truths. Christianity is about a very personal relationship with Jesus Christ the Redeemer. It is about the relationship with a person who gave His life to deliver us from this evil world. When that relationship manifests itself, it is called Christianity. *Act 11:26 And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And **the disciples were called Christians** first in Antioch.* Christianity is about discipleship.

A Christian then, is a person in a relationship with Christ as a learner/follower (disciple) who also stands for Christ in this world. He is a person who represents Christ in this world. *1Pe 4:12 Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: 1Pe 4:13 But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. 1Pe 4:14 **If ye be reproached for the name of Christ**, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. 1Pe 4:15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. 1Pe 4:16 Yet **if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed**; but let him glorify God on this behalf.*

A Christian by definition should exhibit Christ. *1Pe 2:9 But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; **that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light**:*

What behaviour should we expect to see in the life of a follower of Christ? Let me approach the subject by stating the behaviour a Christian should NOT show. The point being that you can never prove who is a Christian (that is only known to you and the Lord personally) but you can say what Christianity is not and what is NOT of Christ. It is a bit like that rule of science that says you can never prove something is true because something may come to light that disproves it.

A person who has been brought to God on man's terms is not of Christ because you must be born again of the Spirit. A person who does not acknowledge their sin and their sinful nature is not of Christ. A person who does not want forgiveness on God's terms is not of Christ. A person who lives a life of wilful sin, is not of Christ. A person who is self-righteous is not of Christ. *Rom 10:3 For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. Rom 10:4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.*

A person who enjoys sin and sin in others is not of Christ. *Rom 1:32 Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.* A person who does not follow Jesus is not of Christ. A person who does not obey Jesus is not of Christ. A person who loves this world, is not of Christ. The natural man is not of Christ.

A person for whom Christ is not first in their life, is not of Christ. *Luk 14:26 If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. Luk 14:27 And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.* A person for whom Christ is not Lord, is not of Christ, *Mat 7:21 Not*

every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

A person who hates their brother, is not of Christ. *1Jn 4:20 If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?* A person who is uncharitable, is not of Christ. *Jas 2:8 If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: Jas 2:9 But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors. Jas 2:10 For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all..... Jas 2:15 If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, Jas 2:16 And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Jas 2:17 Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.*

That is not a comprehensive list but you will see in it that there are some things that make entrance into Christ's Kingdom impossible, that is, if they are a permanent fixture of our lives. If they are things that we continue to do, things that we desire to do or be, we really cannot lay a claim to being a Christian. Yet as we saw, there were people who sinned, did these things and entered God's Kingdom. Was that a statement of one rule for some and another rule for others?

We are saying that there is a perfect standard, an unwavering standard of righteousness in Scripture, but the grace and mercy of God allows forgiveness for transgression. How can that possibly be? To understand that, we must understand the nature of the transformation that Christ works in us. It is to be understood in the two natures that the believer possesses. These natures are in conflict.

*Rom 7:23 But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. Gal 5:16 This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. Gal 5:17 For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: **so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.*** This is at the root of our problem. By nature, we are born into sin and serve one master, satan, *Eph 2:2 Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:* When Christ enters our life, that sinful nature is not immediately removed although it is crucified with Christ. We are in a state of conflict, of conflicting natures.

We are not instantaneously perfected, made absolutely sinless in ourselves. We exist in a state where God can tolerate us because we have the imputed righteousness of Christ. *Rom 4:22 And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. Rom 4:23 Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him;* When I say 'imputed', I mean that it was reckoned to our account, put to our account. It was not our righteousness, it was Christ's righteousness, and He stands that to our account. It is not imparted righteousness, it is imputed righteousness. That means we are not perfect but we are seen by God through the lens of Christ's righteousness and we are right with God because of what another holds on our account. *Rom 4:24 But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead;*

Wesleyan perfectionism, sometimes called entire sanctification, is a view held by John Wesley that taught that Christians could to some degree attain perfection in this life. Wesley described it as¹:

"...that habitual disposition of the soul which, in the sacred writings, is termed holiness; and which directly implies being cleansed from sin, 'from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit'; and, by consequence, being endued with those virtues which were in Christ Jesus; being so 'renewed in the image of our mind,' as to be 'perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect'.

The doctrine of Christian 'perfection' for some Christians, assumes that when we are 'saved', when we have repented, when we are converted, that we are all Christians of equal measure. In one sense we are, in as much as we have the benefits of Christ work put into our account. Yet, we are also very unequal as we stand in knowledge and as far as growth is concerned. There is a spectrum of growth by which I mean that there are 'babes' in Christ, milk drinkers, and then there are the meat eaters, there are the strong and the weak. *Rom 15:1 We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.*

We are at different stages of growth and development in our relationship to Christ. The Lord Christ is moulding each of us for His purpose and polishing us like stones. *Mal 3:17 And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.* We are being transformed.

In this series, as we look at examples of lives transformed, we shall see people that are at different stages of development and although many at times fail, they are still being saved. We should avoid being over critical of them and also of those in our age who are having problems in their walk with Christ. We are all on a journey with Christ. I am not saying that we should condone sin in others or make little of it. If possible we should correct their walk. *Gal 6:1 Brothers and sisters, if a person gets trapped by wrongdoing, those of you who are spiritual should help that person turn away from doing wrong. Do it in a gentle way. At the same time watch yourself so that you also are not tempted.* GW.

We could be very critical of King David. He did some terrible things and we do not condone his behaviour one wit, but he too was in a different place in his relationship with the Lord and in his growth. Today we are far stronger than David, through Christ, *Zec 12:8 In that day shall the LORD defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and he that is feeble among them at that day shall be as David; and the house of David shall be as God, as the angel of the LORD before them.* We must be careful of judging David too harshly. People who reject reproof are treated differently to those who admit sin and are struggling to recover their relationship with the Lord (see Hard Sayings of Jesus).

I have observed that Christians are often very ungracious to other struggling Christians. You would think that Christians were the enemy, the way that they often despise and treat each other. This is not of Christ. It is sometimes also true that we treat the Brethren of Christ worse than we treat unbelievers and we fail to see the slightest glimmer of Christ in them. If it is said of Christ, *Mat 12:20 A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench*, then it must be said of us also, lest our hardness quench that spark. If it is quenched it will be through the world not us.

¹ A Plain Account of Christian Perfectionism, p. 12.

I am not trying to find excuses for sin in our lives or the lives of the Old saints. I am merely explaining that sin is not totally removed from our lives because of those warring natures, and that is why we so often fail. At the same time, the remorse, repentance and forgiveness of sin, strengthens and restores our relationship with Christ. Through failure we begin to see the depths of our sin and the depths of Divine forgiveness. We are as we have observed before, in a personal fight between the flesh and the spirit in us. It is literally a fight to the death. I will bring these issues up again as we continue this study, but I raise them at the start, because the people that we shall meet are as Oliver Cromwell was painted, with 'warts and all'. The Bible does not hide our transgression only the Lord does.

The purpose of our current study series is to try and understand the nature of the transformations that Jesus works in us and the sort of character that He brings out in us. Of course, it is not our character at all. It is the revelation of Christ in us and Christ working through us. It is like those prophets of Old revealing Christ, *1Pe 1:10 Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: 1Pe 1:11 Searching what, or what manner of time the **Spirit of Christ which was in them** did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.*

Unfortunately, many of the lives that we shall examine offer us only part of the story about what has happened to them. We have as it were a small window into their lives, from which we can observe some of the changes brought about by the Lord. While we cannot observe the complete work of the Spirit, we can see what He has worked upon in their lives and how He did it. *Joh 3:8 Only God's Spirit gives new life. The Spirit is like the wind that blows wherever it wants to. You can hear the wind, but you don't know where it comes from or where it is going.* CEV.

When we look at these lives of the saints, we shall not be looking so much at their intellect, the theoretical thoughts that they had. We shall be looking at what they did and how that what they believed, was translated from the spirit in them, out into the reality of this life. How their faith became the works of God that they walked in. Above all it is how Jesus shone out of their lives into the dark world about them. That is what matters. It is not about us or our works, it is about how Jesus works out through us. How much we show, by standing back from our fleshly nature and letting Jesus shine.

What should we be looking for? Meagre moral improvements? A few more good works? Self – generated piety and abstinence? Sack cloth and ashes? Dear saints, we are not looking for self-improvement at all. We are looking to see ourselves air brushed out of our lives, so that others may see Christ in us. As Theodore Monod's hymn reminds us, "Lord, Thy love at last has conquered: "None of self, and all of Thee."" Like John the Baptist, we must decrease that He may increase.

Too much that we pass off as Christianity today is about the cult of personalities, self-promotion, institution building, popularity, being attractive to men and pleasing the flesh, new ideas to entertain, social welfare, creating non-judgemental environments, yet so little of Christ. These things are not promoting Christ to the full, He is secondary to the activities. As Vance Havner wisely observed, "The primary qualification for a missionary is not love for souls, as we so often hear, but love for Christ." If Christ is truly lifted up He will draw all men to Him. That might upset our pride but that is as it should be.

The transformations that we shall observe are the changes that Christ brings about in the lives of His people. It is about how He draws our flesh aside so that we reveal Him. It is about how He puts that old man to death. It is about His triumph over Satan. It is about our weakness being turned into His strength. It does not happen all at once and it does not always happen without stumbling along the way. But it does happen. *2Co 3:18 But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed (μεταμορφόω = metamorphoō = metamorphosed) into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.* As Charles Wesley put it, “Changed from Glory into Glory”. Transformation, metamorphosis is a fact of the Christian life, not just one but many transformations.

2. Abel (perfect sacrifice)

My contention is that anyone entering into a lasting relationship with Jesus must and will be transformed. Where there is no change, no transformation, there hangs over those lives, a huge question mark about any work of grace in them. Jesus is the Transformer. He changes each and every person that He redeems and there are many transformations that we require. As we look at the lives of God’s children, we will not always see the complete transformation but we will see aspects of the transformations and that I hope will encourage us in our walk.

We start at the beginning of scripture where we can see a transformation and also the consequences of a life untransformed. I refer to Abel and Cain. This story is about the most fundamental change that must occur in our lives if we are to be redeemed. It is about how we come to terms with sin and how we are reconciled to God. Every Christian has been to this place. There was a time when we looked at Christ’s death as irrelevant to us. It had no place in our lives, even though we might use religion for our own needs. We started life as Cain. There came a time when we looked at the Sacrifice of Christ in a totally different way. It became precious, of inestimable value, absolutely essential to our very existence and we became as Abel.

Cain was the elder brother and Abel the younger brother. We have no idea of their age or the names of their other siblings at this point in their lives. One became an arable farmer and the other a livestock farmer, *Gen 4:2....Abel was a shepherd, and Cain was a farmer.* GW. How they arrived at that career path is not known but I imagine that growing up with Adam, working their ‘farm’ they showed their individual preferences. I do not think that it was a large farm at that stage, probably more of a small holding and the farming was ‘hunter gatherer’ rather than highly mechanised.

There was obviously a lot of land and a tiny labour force in those far off days, so the scale of farming was limited by population size. We do not know what tools were available to them and whether they had an innate knowledge of technology. Within a few generations, Cain’s descendants had mastered spinning and weaving, although tents were also made of skin by the nomadic herdsman. I say nomadic because they would move from pasture to pasture and their portable home, the tent, facilitated this. Music was an integral part of this early community as they had also developed string and wind instruments. *Gen 4:20 And Adah bare Jabal: he was the father of such as dwell in tents, and of such as have cattle. Gen 4:21 And his brother's name was Jubal: he was the father of all such as handle the harp and organ. Gen 4:22 And Zillah, she also bare Tubalcain, an instructor of every artificer in brass and iron: and the sister of Tubalcain was Naamah.* The transition from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age was very rapid.

The scripture though, does not dwell on these achievements but examines the formal development of religious practice. We might remind ourselves that these ancestors were vegetarians before the flood. I mention this because killing the sheep for food was not a part of the requirement for daily living. They may have used the flock for milk, cheese making and wool but not meat as part of their diet. Animals were reserved for sacrifices and we ask whether Adam as the head of the family was making these offerings to the Lord. Perhaps he did but in this instance we are looking at personal offerings rather than community sacrifice.

Religion in whatever form that it developed, created hierarchies to manage its rituals. People began to mediate on the behalf of others and so we see the introduction of priests. Here with Cain and Abel we see something that we perhaps miss in our day. The personal engagement in sacrifice which in Abel's case meant getting blood on his hands. Do we really appreciate that? If we had to kill a sacrifice, would that affect our attitude? Would we say, "I do not think that my sin is that bad that it requires the death of another." Do you see how we in the NT have become separated from the reality of the substitutionary sacrifice? We scarce give it a thought. We take the death of Christ just as we accept the sanitized products in supermarkets, wrapped in cling film, no blood on show, no image of the creature led to the slaughterhouse. Our religion is sanitised and we are happy for others to manage it for us be they priest or pastor. We needs must go back to the cross regularly to see the sacrifice of Christ, to appreciate what Jesus has done for us and what such love demands from our lives. How can we live for the world when He died to deliver us from it? We need to see the blood on our own hands in order to appreciate the nature of that sacrifice. If we cannot look Christ in the face on the cross, we cannot look our own sin in the face either.

There comes a day when the two brothers make a personal offering to the Lord. It reflects their attitude to sin. This may not have been the first time that they offered but it is the time that it leads to conflict. One offered of the fruit of the ground, the other of the flock. *Gen 4:3 And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD.* The word 'offering' is also used also for Abel's offering and can mean a 'present', *Gen 43:26 And when Joseph came home, they brought him the **present** which was in their hand into the house, and bowed themselves to him to the earth.* It can also be used of a sacrificial burnt offering, *Exo 29:41 And the other lamb thou shalt offer at even, and shalt do thereto according to the meat offering of the morning, and according to the drink offering thereof, for a sweet savour, **an offering made by fire** unto the LORD.*

Why did Cain and Abel offer differently? If Cain knew that his offering would be unacceptable why did he continue in his action? There surely must have been some Divine guidance on what they should do and why they should do it? Cain however, is like the majority of humanity which in my opinion is driven to worship because it is innate to its nature. Man was created to worship his Creator just as he was created to procreate. He is driven to be creative in the arts and sciences. He is driven because he was designed in this way but sin has clouded his vision, he is blind to truth. This is why I believe that we see so many different forms of worship.

Of course people like that do not take the time to ask what God really wants. They think that they know already or perhaps they do not care. They believe that you can walk in on God at any time and that He will accept whatever kind gift you bring to appease Him. Cain is the religious man who checks in on God occasionally, not as a sinner but as an equal. He goes to 'church' as it were, to

satisfy a desire to worship and that on his own terms. He chooses a brand of religion that provides personal satisfaction without obligation.

I suppose that Cain is like the person who gave you a gift and you thought, what on earth is this for? I really do not like that perfume or chocolate or whatever it is. Surely they knew what I liked? That is the religion of Cain, it is a thoughtless, selfish and ignorant. Cain should have known from a child, just as Abel, what God required of them. I do not believe that there were two sets of beliefs on offer. Cain deliberately made a decision that he would choose his own way to worship the Creator, whereas Abel followed the Creator's choice. Jude warns the churches about the apostates in their midst and uses Cain as an example, *Jud 1:11 Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core.*

The importance of the story of Cain and Abel lies in their offerings. It must be the first step that a person makes to be reconciled with his Creator. It is a step based upon the conviction that sin must be dealt with by a substitutionary atonement. To be acceptable, that sacrifice must be designated by the One who has been offended, the Lord. It is a step that can only occur if one has listened to the Word of God and it is consequently a transformation. The scripture further informs us that Abel's action was an act of faith, *Heb 11:4 By faith Abel offered unto God a **more excellent sacrifice** than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.* Observe that Scripture records nothing that came out of the mouth of Abel, not one word while he lived but in death he left a message that has echoed over the millennia.

What separated Cain and Abel was Faith. Faith is about being fully persuaded of the things of God such that it leads to acting in obedience to God. *Rom 4:19 And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara's womb: Rom 4:19 And being about a hundred years old, not weakening in faith, he did not consider his body to have died already, nor yet the death of Sarah's womb, Rom 4:20 and **did not stagger by unbelief at the promise of God, but was empowered by faith**, giving glory to God, Rom 4:21 and **being fully persuaded** that what He has promised, He is also able to do. Rom 4:22 Because of this, "it was also counted to him for righteousness."* LITV.

There are two points here that I would draw your attention to. **Firstly**, that faith empowers us to do what is right. Faith is not just any old belief. It is not a well meaning attitude, a hopeful anticipation that you are right. It is **a belief that causes us to make the right choice**, the right action. It is a belief that works or rather **produces a good deed**. A righteous man, such as Abel is a man who acts in faith, a man who believes God and does what is right in God's sight. *Rom 4:3 For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.* Cain is 'faithless' and consequentially is sinful in his actions. *Rom 14:22 Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth. Rom 14:23 And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for **whatsoever is not of faith is sin.***

Secondly, with true faith comes 'full persuasion' that is, it comes with full assurance. When God tells us to do something, if the believer is fully persuaded, fully assured of what God says then God's promises are always fulfilled. It is not guess work or wishful thinking. True faith is confident not hopeful. Dear Abel had in the course of his life, met with his Creator in a totally different way to his brother Cain. A change had occurred in his life such that he believed the promises of God, he believed the word of God and as a result had been transformed. **This is one of the key stages of our**

new life. We have been made to accept God's sacrifice in place of our own works. Both of these sons of Adam would have heard the family stories, how his parents had sinned, how the devil separated them from the peace of God, how they had been expelled from the garden, how there would be a long war against satan, *Gen 3:15 And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.*

How did Cain and Abel react to that prophecy? Cain did the serpent's work and murdered his brother because Cain was a devil. *1Jn 3:11 For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. 1Jn 3:12 Not as **Cain, who was of that wicked one**, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because **his own works were evil**, and his brother's righteous. 1Jn 3:13 Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.* Cain followed the way of the serpent and Abel the way of the Creator.

Cain was prepared to go along outwardly with God but in his heart of hearts he had decided to go along with satan. Cain's sacrifice was not an act of well meaning ignorance, it was not someone who wanted to please his Creator but somehow got it wrong. It was a deliberately calculated evil deed. Cain's 'sacrifice' was a mockery of religion because "**his own works were evil and he was of the wicked one.**" Cain hated Christ the Creator and Christ in His people and Abel was his target.

I believe that Abel knew Christ because he knew his Creator, perhaps not in the detail that we do but he knew Him and was able to see the nature of His sacrifice in the Lamb of God. *Isa 53:7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: **he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter**, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.* He had heard the story of how God had covered his parent's nakedness with the skins of a dead animal. He too wanted that covering, to be under the wings of the Almighty. Cain did not and his face fell at the rejection. You will see that anger in the face of Cain's descendents today, when they are told that their worship, their practice is contrary to what Christ asks of them. When they are confronted with God's word, it produces anger and resistance. Their countenances change and if you look carefully, you will see the devil behind their eyes. *Gen 4:6 And the LORD said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? Gen 4:7 If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door.*

People hate that challenge to their beliefs, when those beliefs about God are revealed as sin. One day the Lord has a word in Cain's ear. It is a day when Cain has the realisation, the conviction that his offering is useless and unacceptable *Gen 4:6 Then the LORD asked Cain, "Why are you angry, and why do you look disappointed? Gen 4:7 If you do well, won't you be accepted? But if you don't do well, sin is lying outside your door ready to attack. It wants to control you, but you must master it."* GW. But instead of repenting and doing what is right, he sets out to destroy the person that pleased God. Bad people do not, contrary to some opinion, like good people. Who can these people take their anger out upon? They take it out upon the people who love God. Cain did not love God and he hated the people of God because that is what the devil breeds in his sinful children. *1Jn 3:13 Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.* I would that we had a record of that conversation between Cain and Abel in the fields, *Gen 4:8 Cain talked to his brother Abel. Later, when they were in the fields, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.* GW.

I imagine that Cain came up to his brother and initiated the conversation, 'Cain talked to Abel'. I imagine that he was boiling with anger and when people are angry, they are rude, insolent and

threatening. He would have blasphemed the Creator and mocked the worship of his brother but what I think really got to him was, that Abel did not take the bait and respond. Like Jesus, when religious people get angry, there is little you can say to them. *Mar 14:60 And the high priest stood up in the midst, and asked Jesus, saying, Answerest thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee? Mar 14:61 But he held his peace, and answered nothing.* Cain's anger was I think, directed at Christ in Abel. Cain was the first antichrist.

In death, Abel's voice is finally heard. In life he was a silent witness, whose deeds spoke louder than any words. The first martyr preached a sermon in Christ through the life that was in him, it was a wordless sermon that spoke a thousand words, a thousand tongues "My great Redeemer's praise, The glories of my God and King, The triumphs of His grace!" Many tongues have since spoken of Abel's faith.

Let us never forget that Christ in us is His own witness when we let Him have the pre-eminence and when we stop interfering with the way He wants to work through us. Christ spoke through Abel as He does through all martyrs. In death Abel's voice becomes even louder and echoes down the ages before his Maker. *Gen 4:10 And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground.* What does it cry? *Rev 6:9 And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: Rev 6:10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?* How much more does the blood of Christ cry out unto God?.

Now there are a lot of people who think that they are 'Christian martyrs' because they suffer some ill-treatment but I must make the point that if we suffer because we are stupid, careless, ignorant and thoughtless, it is just us that suffers and rightly so. On the other hand, *1Pe 4:15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. 1Pe 4:16 Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.* Do you see those words 'suffer as a Christian'.

When Abel suffered it was because Cain was attacking Christ in him. Cain was not attacking Abel but Christ and so hate filled is satan against every manifestation of Christ, that he wants Him dead. He wanted to kill Christ at the start of His ministry and jump off of the Temple, later he thought he had succeeded at the Cross. That is the devil's downfall. It was through the death of Christ that death was overcome. *Heb 2:14 Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that **through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;** Heb 2:15 And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.*

I think that Abel had the greater weight of devils to contend with in a world with fewer souls. There was not the multitude of fallen humanity to toy with and destroy as yet. The whole evil host could concentrate on this one good man and unleash death. When they had, they must have felt a surge of triumph. The one good man was dead, the evil brother victorious, who now would carry the Gospel? But for the grace of God, satan would have us all dead. *1Pe 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 1Pe 1:4 into an inheritance imperishable and undefiled and unfading, reserved in heaven for you 1Pe 1:5 **who are being protected by the power of***

God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. LEB. We are protected by the power of God and that is a sobering point.

We are not in some mutual compromise with satan, an agreeable standoff, we are at war. I do not think that most Christians have any idea about the seriousness of our situation. Christianity has a weird view of this, because every 25th December it makes a declaration of 'peace and goodwill to all mankind'. It reminds me of that first Christmas of the Great War, when belligerents came out of their trenches and fraternised with the enemy. One day we are fighting each other and the next it was an armistice. No wonder the generals were angry and forbade it. Do you think the devil and his hosts sit around eating turkey and making merry? If that fiend would roast anything it would be a Christian. No, they are active, death is not on hold, the war is still on and every Cain would kill his Abel.

Abel died a martyr to the cause of Christ but he was also something else. He was a prophet. *Luk 11:49 Therefore also said the wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they shall slay and persecute: Luk 11:50 That the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation; Luk 11:51 From the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, which perished between the altar and the temple: verily I say unto you, It shall be required of this generation.*

That remark was a rebuke to the Lawyers and Pharisees of Jesus' day, the 'smart' people, the religious intelligentsia, the people who propped up the evil deeds of their ancestors who persecuted the prophets. These prophets, like Abel were sent by the Wisdom of God to bear testimony against the evil generation of apostate Jews. The people that they read about in the Torah would appear as witnesses for the prosecution on the day of judgement.

Abel's life was not in vain and it is a lesson to us that a life lived well carries a lasting testimony. *Mat 5:14 Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.* As Abel's blood poured out of his dying body and the light of this life faded, another light would have appeared to him and he would have entered into the joy of his Lord. **He was the first person to go to heaven.** I wonder how things work when one leaves time for eternity? When Abel got to heaven was he alone with Jesus until the next believer arrived? Did he have Jesus all to himself for a brief timeless moment? He could not yet be in Abraham's bosom for Abraham had not yet entered the story of redemption. Abel was in the Bosom of Christ.

For Adam and his family, it was the first real taste of human mortality, the curse was starting to work. They were returning to the dust. They had never been to a funeral, they did not know what a dead body looked like, they did not know what should be done to a corpse. Perhaps they enquired of the Lord, perhaps they reasoned that as their boy's blood had gone into the ground, so his body must follow. We know not.

Yet the first funeral must take place, the first grave is dug, the first burial made and the first memorial stands to all who pass, that sin, death and sorrow are a reality. How did those first parents and their remaining family pass that evening together? Cain was now an outcast and a wanderer, marked by God and the other son was lying cold in the grave. How is it possible that two men subject to the same upbringing can turn out so differently? What could the parent's have done differently? Was it even in their power to change those events and could they live with the

consequences? If they had done nothing to encourage the boys to attend upon the things of God, they would have had their consciences wracked for life because they had let Cain go his own way unchecked. Yet if they had done what was right and nothing came of it, they could at least say that they had honoured God and have some peace in that.

If there was any comfort in all of this, it was that Abel was right with God. He had a relationship with God and his sins were forgiven. He would rest in peace and glory in the presence of His Lord. As the weeds and thorns grew around the tomb and 'nature' adds its own voice to the condemnation of mankind, so the importance of Abel's sacrifice will also grow and his voice speak even louder. *Heb 11:4 By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: **and by it he being dead yet speaketh.***

Abel was being transformed and in death that transformation was complete in Christ. If there is any comfort in death, this must be the greatest.

3. Saving Rahab (faith)

Our next transformation examines the life of Rahab. Like Abel, Rahab had to make a decision who she would serve. Whether she would serve the God of the Hebrews or the gods of Canaan. I am reminded of the later words of the General, whose army was arrayed against the city of Jericho, where she lived. *Jos 24:15 And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD. Jos 24:16 And the people answered and said, God forbid that we should forsake the LORD, to serve other gods;*

This transformation examines the cost of discipleship. *Luk 14:33 So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.* Today we offer deliverance on different terms. We say 'come to Jesus', 'get forgiven' and then make the best of this life. We do not include these essential elements, that of discipleship, service and sanctification. It is like people who get a passport to a new life in a new country, while deciding to stay and live their old life in their old country. You cannot serve two masters and Rahab has to make a choice, whether to go with the people of God or die where she stands. That is the choice that we should be presenting with the Gospel, yet we do not. We make it into easy believism. We have a Gospel that says Christ forgives you and you can stay where you were. That is a false Gospel.

If we are serious about the offer of deliverance, like Rahab, it requires total commitment. It requires a transformation that involves an exchange of Kings and an exchange of Kingdoms. What Rahab shows in antitype, we have in reality. Rahab must exchange Baal and Ashteroth for Jehovah, Canaan for Israel. The new believer must exchange satan for Christ, Earth for Heaven. This another transformation. *Col 1:13 Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son:* This is a transformation, a transition and a translation.

Let us visit Rahab's city. Jericho is probably the oldest city in the world. It is a strategic site by a ford of the Jordan controlling the ancient trade routes from the East. After crossing the river these routes branched out, one going toward Bethel and Shechem in the north, another westward to Jerusalem, and a third to Hebron in the south. Thus Jericho controlled the access to the hill country of Palestine from Transjordan. One of its notorious citizens was Rahab. Rahab was a member of what some have

called the world's oldest profession. She was a practicing whore and in a city like Jericho, business must have been brisk. Perhaps because she lived on the city wall, she was one of the first people that visitors met?

It is easy to condemn her but I imagine she made her life choice in order to support her parents and siblings for whom she had considerable affection and as we shall see, saved their lives. Be careful what you say of this lady, because you will meet her one day. You are talking about my sister. People often like to belittle the Heroes and Heroines of scripture and delight in pointing out their failings and their weaknesses. Perhaps it is done because it makes our own self-righteousness look better. We thank God that we are not like that sinner but I know of no one who is not a sinner and as sinners go, all are equally vile and no sin is lesser than another, so we all lie together in the sewer of life. None of us is better than Rahab and the chances are we are far less excusable. Be very careful for God declared her righteous and to mock that is to mock Christ. Her beginning did not fix her end and she is a royal Princess, of the house of Christ, a royal lineage.

Remember that there are harlots in Church *1Co 11:6 For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered.* Like the French women collaborators in WW2 who had their heads shaved when Paris was liberated.

I picture Rahab as a good looking woman, perhaps totally lacking in modesty but not wanting in the finery and perfumery of her trade. Bold and brash, I see her shouting from her house, built into the walls of Jericho, with a window facing the world of opportunities. A woman of the world, smart and strong. A woman with an answer for everything, a survivor, because that is what she had to become.

She was a Canaanite and would have believed in many different gods and goddesses. They made idols, which were supposed to look like these gods, and they worshiped them in hilltop temples. One of the most important was Baal, god of fertility and weather. It would be a strange providence that many centuries into the future, another Canaanite woman would meet her ancestor, Jesus and this woman too would exhibit extraordinary faith, *Mat 15:22 And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.* This wise Canaanite woman believed in Jesus, *Mat 15:28 Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, **great is thy faith:** be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.* Did she realise that Jesus, so to speak, had Canaanite blood in His veins?

The disciples of Jesus would have sent the Canaanite woman away but not the Lord. Back in Rahab's day too, the same Lord Jesus, as Jehovah, had plans for the Canaanite prostitute Rahab. Jesus would oversee the transformation of Rahab and secure her future since she was an essential part of His earthly lineage. *Mat 1:5 and Salmon fathered Boaz out of Rahab, and Boaz fathered Obed out of Ruth, and Obed fathered Jesse,* LITV. Of course, none of this was known to Rahab who as we meet her in scripture is about to have her world, literally shaken apart.

The Israeli army is massing to invade the West bank of the Jordan. After 38 lost years, they are about to enter the promised land under the command of Joshua. The invasion will take place just before Passover at the time of the spring harvest, *Jos 5:10 And the children of Israel encamped in Gilgal, and kept the passover on the fourteenth day of the month at even in the plains of Jericho.* Like any good General, Joshua sent a reconnoitring party to gather intelligence about the disposition of the enemy.

The issue of victory was not in doubt, because God had promised victory. There was as we shall see, another reason.

Among the Israeli soldiers camped in the plain of Jericho was a certain young man called Salmon and he too was about to enter the history books. It has been suggested that Salmon was one of the two spies and later became Rahab's husband. It is a romantic thought to see him clambering over the fallen rubble of the city walls to rescue her and her family but that is speculation. What we could suggest is that there was no real need to go into Jericho, as it was no military match for the Israeli Defence Force. They could have observed just as well and safer from a distance and it does not appear that entering the city did much more than put the lives of the spies at greater risk.

Jericho was doomed from the outset. Everything in Jericho apart from precious metals was to be totally destroyed. *Jos 6:18 But stay away from what has been claimed by the LORD for destruction, or you, too, will be destroyed by the LORD. If you take anything that is claimed by the LORD, you will bring destruction and disaster on the camp of Israel. Jos 6:19 All the silver and gold and everything made of bronze and iron are holy and belong to the LORD. They must go into the LORD'S treasury.*GW.

I am going to suggest that the real reason that the men went into Jericho was for '**saving Rahab**'. It was an act of Sovereign Grace that the Lord chose this woman from the population of Canaan and more than that, to place a gentile in the line of the Saviour. Saving Rahab, was necessary for the future of redemption and she must be rescued out of that destruction. I am reminded of that other place of destruction, Sodom, which lay some 40km to the south of Jericho. Two angels went to that city to save Lot from the impending destruction. Rahab too must be saved but it is not clear at this stage that she knew how important she was but she was the only living being in Jericho worth saving.

The transition from Heathen to Israelite, Gentile to true Jew, unbeliever to believer, does not appear to follow a specific formula as far as the experience commences. I say experience because it has an emotional content and is personal to each one that makes the transition from death to life. Nicodemus was told by Jesus that it was by water and the spirit that a man is transformed. *Joh 3:4 Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Joh 3:5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.* I shall look at what it means to be 'born again' in a future study.

It is an act of Sovereign Grace, and purely a work of the Holy Spirit, *Joh 3:8 The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you don't know where the wind comes from or where it's going. **That's the way it is with everyone born of the Spirit.***" GW. There is no controlling the Spirit and He comes and goes at His good pleasure like the wind. You cannot create a formula that will make a person born again. Getting up out of your seats and coming to the Altar rail to 'give your heart to Jesus' is not what it is about. We are not given entry to the Kingdom by any work or act of man, be it sprinkling, Christening, blessing or dedication. They are all fails.

Yet there is that singularity, "*so is every one that is born of the Spirit*". It is the same for everyone who is born again, it is a miracle of the Spirit and it is nothing to do with men. That miracle was working in Rahab before the Israeli Army arrived at Jericho. This is what she had to say, *Jos 2:9 And*

she said unto the men, **I know that the LORD hath given you the land**, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. Jos 2:10 For **we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed.** Jos 2:11 And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath.

Faith was coming as she heard what God had done and would do. She believed that her cause was lost with the Canaanites and her hope lay elsewhere. The fear of The Lord is one of the pathways used by the Spirit of God. Pro 2:3 Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; Pro 2:4 If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; Pro 2:5 **Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God.** Rahab and her family had been scared when they heard of the Acts of Jehovah.

Sometimes it takes a big event to shake us out of our complacency. For one man as we shall see, he had to be crucified before he came to his senses. Here with Rahab, the fear mounted as she began to understand the consequences of staying with the Canaanites. She was becoming an Israelite, Deu 10:12 And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul.

The spies did not have to persuade Rahab of their cause, because by the time that they arrived she was quite prepared to assist them. Jos 2:1 From Shittim Joshua, son of Nun, secretly sent out two men as spies. He told them, "Go, look at that country, especially the city of Jericho." So they went to Jericho and entered the house of a prostitute named Rahab to spend the night there. Jos 2:2 The king of Jericho was told, "Some Israelites have entered the city tonight. They came to gather information about our land." Jos 2:3 So the king of Jericho sent messengers to Rahab, who told her, "Bring out the men who came to your house. They came here to gather information about the entire land." Jos 2:4 But the woman had already taken the two men inside and hidden them. So she said, "Yes, the men did come here. But I didn't know where they had come from. Jos 2:5 When it was dark and the gate was just about to close, they left. I don't know where they went. If you hurry, you'll catch up with them." Jos 2:6 (She had taken them up to the roof and covered them with the flax which she had laid up there.) Jos 2:7 The king's men pursued them on the road leading to a shallow place to cross the Jordan River. As soon as the king's men had left, the gate was closed. GW.

Something had happened to convince her of the power of Jehovah. Jos 2:8 Before the spies fell asleep, Rahab went up to them on the roof. Jos 2:9 She said to them, "**I know the LORD will give you this land.** Your presence terrifies us. All the people in this country are deathly afraid of you. Jos 2:10 We've heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea in front of you when you left Egypt. We've also heard what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites, who ruled east of the Jordan River. We've heard how you destroyed them for the LORD. Jos 2:11 When we heard about it, we lost heart. There was no courage left in any of us because of you. The LORD your God is the God of heaven and earth. GW.

In the 11th Chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, in which Rahab is mentioned, this statement is made. Heb 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must

believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek (ἐκζητέω = ekzēteō) *him*. This today would be called 'due diligence'. Due diligence is defined as the care a reasonable person should take before entering into an agreement or a transaction with another party. There is I think, a healthy scepticism that makes us question the truth, that we may be led in turn, to find the truth. The question is, "How do you know that you have found the true God?"

The person that comes to God must believe that He 'is'. What does this mean? He 'is' what? It does not merely acknowledge existence, indeed even the devils believe in the existence of God. It is far more than that. He explained to Moses, *Exo 3:14 And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you. The Gospel explains, Joh 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Joh 1:2 The same was in the beginning with God. Joh 1:3 All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. Joh 1:4 In him was life; and the life was the light of men.*

So how much did Rahab need to know about the Lord? Rahab had believed the accounts of the Sovereign God enough to desire to be part of His family. She throws her lot in with the nation but that is just part of the journey of transformation. She must be forgiven and sanctified, set apart. *Jos 6:23 And the young men that were spies went in, and brought out Rahab, and her father, and her mother, and her brethren, and all that she had; and they brought out all her kindred, and **left them without the camp of Israel.*** They must now go through another transition.

Up to this point, it is unclear whether Rahab has found forgiveness. There has been no offering, no sacrifice so far. Yet in the eyes of God obedience can count for more than sacrifice, *1Sa 15:22 And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.* However, sacrifice is necessary and it will come.

One thing that she did do was to hang a scarlet rope out of her window. I see in this, a symbol of the Passover. It is in a manner of speaking a Passover. The judgement on Jericho, the destruction, the judgement will not fall on her house. The destroyers will pass over her and she will be delivered because she displayed her faith.

Rahab must cast away all of that life which she had polluting her. *Deu 21:10 When thou goest forth to war against thine enemies, and the LORD thy God hath delivered them into thine hands, and thou hast taken them captive, Deu 21:11 And seest among the captives a beautiful woman, and hast a desire unto her, that thou wouldest have her to thy wife; Deu 21:12 Then thou shalt bring her home to thine house; and **she shall shave her head, and pare her nails;** Deu 21:13 And she shall put the raiment of her captivity from off her, and shall remain in thine house, and bewail her father and her mother a full month: and after that thou shalt go in unto her, and be her husband, and she shall be thy wife. Deu 21:14 And it shall be, if thou have no delight in her, then thou shalt let her go whither she will; but thou shalt not sell her at all for money, thou shalt not make merchandise of her, because thou hast humbled her.*

She goes on to marry Salmon and becomes the mother of Boaz. *Jos 6:25 And Joshua saved Rahab the harlot alive, and her father's household, and all that she had; and she dwelleth in Israel even unto this day; because she hid the messengers, which Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.* I have to say that I

admire her husband. He is a man full of forgiveness. A man who can let another's past go. A man who looks to the future not the past.

According to MSN Living, adultery is the most common motive for divorce in the UK with 55 percent of all divorcees stating it contributed to their break up. Even those who believe they can stay with their partner have difficulty restoring trust. The person who did the cheating may be repentant but the person who was cheated on often feels so betrayed that they can't get past it. They continue to punish their partner for the deep hurt they feel and the relationship often crumbles.

So called 'christians' are often unwilling to forgive and forget the past and I cannot see how they in turn will be forgiven. *Mat 6:15 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.* Yet here in Rahab's life is a man who is prepared to exhibit that great trait of his esteemed descendent Jesus. Salmon does not hold her past against her and why should he? She is a changed woman.

While God forgives us, sometimes life sticks to you. I am sure that her life and former profession were history and that she became a virtuous woman, a mother in Israel. Yet our Lord, the inspirer of sacred scripture continues to record His ancestor's sin. Rahab the harlot. Why, if God no longer remembers our transgression, rake it up? I suggest that it is in no wise to belittle or undermine Rahab. She is in the joy of her Lord now but it is written for us. It is a reminder that sin can be forgiven but the consequences may linger. It is a warning for us to consider our behaviour and actions for the future.

Was the future for Rahab made easy by this transformation? I doubt it very much. We Christians, although we know our own transformation and that the past is forgiven by Christ, yet we live in a world that never forgets. Those past friends, those casual liaisons would have sailed through her life on occasion. They would have expected the same old Rahab to appear, to be the same woman, behave in the same lewd ways. You and I will inevitably find that our past will appear, someone in it will mention things that we did and what we were. They will joke about it or mock it but never understand or believe that it is gone. It is forgiven. It is behind us. To deny that fact is to deny Christ, so we must leave it in the past.

The new creation would be unseen to those blind eyes. They would not understand forgiveness but she had been transformed and her eyes opened to her future, *Heb 11:13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.* That is just where we are.

For now we leave her at peace, *Jos 6:25 And Joshua saved Rahab the harlot alive, and her father's household, and all that she had; and she dwelleth in Israel even unto this day; because she hid the messengers, which Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.* She will never be forgotten. Her name is carried forward through the millennia and she will reappear in the sacred genealogy written by the tax gatherer Matthew.

4. Nicodemus (Born again)

Where does our transformation begin? Where do we start on our journey from this life to the next? Is it something that can be precisely timed to the smallest fraction of a second? When are we saved? When are we converted? When are we born again?

If it had not been for the visit of Nicodemus, I do not think that the term 'born again' would have entered the modern evangelist's vocabulary. Peter does mention it in his epistle *1Pe 1:22 Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: 1Pe 1:23 Being born again, **not of corruptible seed**, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.* While Peter looks at it more as a consequence of spiritual life, Jesus looks at it as an essential to enter the Kingdom of God and it is certainly a transformation.

With such an important issue, we ask why does it not appear in the evangelism of the Apostles? Why do they not call upon people to be born again? They say, *Act 3:19 Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; Act 3:20 And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you:* There is not one word about the new birth. Despite this it has become a mantra for the modern evangelists²:

The idea of "born again" Christians is a popular one in many evangelical circles in the United States, although it is not used much by most other Christian traditions or outside the United States. It generally refers to a personal relationship with God through Jesus established by a momentary or instantaneous experience of conversion, often accompanied by intense emotion. This is usually equated with "getting saved," meaning that all sins are now forgiven and a person is ready for heaven. It is the point where a person accepts the forgiveness of God and becomes a Christian.

In popular thinking it is often the experience itself that marks being born again, while others emphasize faith, repentance, and the grace of God as the most important aspects. In some churches, being "born again" is the mark of a true Christian, so that those who do not claim such an experience are not truly Christians. In this usage, a "born again Christian" is substantially different from just a "Christian," which is taken to be more of a cultural designation. This often leads to rejecting other Christian traditions, for example Roman Catholics or even some mainline Protestant churches, as not authentically Christian because they do emphasize as much this singular moment of decision.

The language of "born again" as it is popularly used in modern evangelicalism goes far beyond what can be sustained by either Scripture or the Traditions of the Faith. "Born again" in this context usually refers only to a particular Protestant evangelical revivalist expression of rebirth, associated with a specific type of acceptance of salvation by praying specific prayers. None of that is in view in John 3. Nor do any of the other

² <http://www.crivoice.org/bornagain.htm> This is a very good article.

passages in Scripture that speak of newness or new birth specify the details of how that is to be accomplished.

For evangelists like Billy Graham, a simple prayer of commitment starts the process of salvation:

We can't earn salvation; we are saved by God's grace when we have faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. All you have to do is believe you are a sinner, that Christ died for your sins, and ask His forgiveness. Then turn from your sins—that's called repentance. Jesus Christ knows you and loves you. What matters to Him is the attitude of your heart, your honesty. We suggest praying the following prayer to accept Christ as your Saviour: Dear Lord Jesus, I know I am a sinner, and I ask for your forgiveness. I believe you died for my sins and rose from the dead. I trust and follow you as my Lord and Saviour. Guide my life and help me to do your will. In your name, amen."

Joel Osteen, who I like and is quite charming, puts it this way:

"We never like to close our broadcast without giving you an opportunity to make Jesus the Lord of your life." He challenges them to repeat a prayer, "Lord Jesus, I repent of my sins. Come into my heart. I make you my Lord and Saviour. Friends, if you prayed that simple prayer we believe you got born again. Get in a good Bible-based church. Keep God in first place. He's going to take you where you never dreamed."

I am not criticising these men, I merely quote them to illustrate the way modern evangelism turns to personal salvation through a prayer of commitment. Can we really call ourselves to life? Can a dead man birth himself? Is it really that simple? Have we blown the whole idea of the 'new birth' out of proportion? It is doubtless a subject that should concern us because the consequences of not being 'born again' puts us beyond redemption with every other sinner, *1Co 6:9 Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind,*

Joh 3:5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

The 'new birth' is a work of God's Spirit and it is essential to any consideration of the transformation that a believer undergoes, to consider the work of the Holy Spirit in that transformation. I say that because there can be no transformation without the intervention of the Holy Spirit in our lives. This commences with our birth into the Kingdom of God. *Joh 3:4 Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Joh 3:5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.* Our birth is the work of the Holy Spirit.

When the old Pharisee comes to Jesus he is literally and metaphorically speaking, in the dark. He comes at night and he comes in ignorance. He is a renowned teacher in Israel but he does not know this teaching that Jesus puts to him. I remind you that this is not simply a teaching for the New

Testament, it is grounded in the Old Testament and Nicodemus should have known about it. Now the question might be raised, could Nicodemus have been born again without knowing it? Let me suggest that he could have but did not understand the concept. Perhaps he was not familiar with the way that Jesus presents it to him. I venture to suggest that if the same conversation had been held with the disciples, they would have been none the wiser. I am sure many Christians today do not grasp what is implied in the statement. You must be born again!

This term 'born again' that Jesus uses, has not appeared in OT scripture. We might then sympathise with Nicodemus because, like you or me, we could go through our concordance and find no direct reference to it in the OT. We might think that it is a new teaching for a New Testament but is that so? Is it rather a familiar teaching put in a different form of words?

Nicodemus visit is placed in John's narrative, between the 'Cleansing of the Temple' and Jesus ministry, including Baptism, superseding John the Baptist's ministry. It is placed in a manner of speaking between the removal of the old Kingdom and the beginning of the new Kingdom. We must also remember that John is writing with a specific purpose, *Joh 20:31 But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.* John, out of all the things that Jesus said and did, has selected those things which are most appropriate to encouraging belief in Christ and through that, salvation.

If people want to 'see' this kingdom, they need a rebirth not a patching up. They need regenerating not repairing. If you want to go in to that Kingdom, enter it, then you must be born in a different way, by 'water' and the 'spirit'. Dear Nicodemus is confused because he realises that this is a complete transformation and so he asks, *Joh 3:4 Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?* It is a good point. How? So Jesus patiently explains that it is like birth but it is a different type of birth. *Joh 3:6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.* It is a spiritual birth and a rebirth at that. As Peter said, *1Pe 1:23 Being born again, **not of corruptible seed**, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.*

'Corruptible seed' refers to what we are by birth, by nature. We are flesh that has been corrupted and that cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven. *1Co 15:53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. 1Co 15:54 So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.*

The Kingdom of God is not about natural, fleshly Kingdoms, corrupt Kingdoms filled with corrupt people. It is about a heavenly Kingdom. You may recall our studies on Prophecy, where we saw how many people today still look for an earthly Kingdom of God, they look for a restoration of the Apostate earthly nation of Israel, resettled in Jerusalem. That may or may not have been Nicodemus' expectation but he is left in no doubt that as Paul says, *1Co 15:50 Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.* Salvation is deliverance from this evil world into the Kingdom of His dear Son.

I will also point out that this redirection of thinking by Jesus, given by the One who came from above, issues in that great statement, *Joh 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* In the

context of this passage, that love of God is wrapped in Christ and the reality of His saving work can only be seen through the Spiritual rebirth.

We can put many ideas together about how the Spirit gives us new birth by “water” and the “Spirit”. I do not think that it has anything to do with water baptism, which after all is only a metaphor for a spiritual transition. More likely, we should understand ‘water’ in the sense of the medium through which we are cleansed. *Eze 36:25 Then will I sprinkle **clean water** upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. Eze 36:26 A new heart also will I give you, and **a new spirit** will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. Eze 36:27 And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.*

The Spirit of God was working in the lives of men in the Old Testament and you can find many examples for yourselves but I will give just one. *Luk 1:15 For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb.* God works even in the unborn. However, there is no definitive set of scriptures to be dogmatic about, except the fact that we ‘must’ be born again. It is a subjective experience not philosophical theology. It must be known and knowable. How do we know?

It cannot be demanded or commanded. Did you did bring about your fleshly, your natural life? It was brought about, as it were, by the actions of others, your parents. It was totally beyond your control. That is equally true of this rebirth. Jesus makes it quite clear *Joh 3:8 The Spirit breathes where He desires, and you hear His voice; but you do not know from where He comes, and where He goes; so is everyone having been generated from the Spirit.* LITV. In other words, it comes about in an unseen manner but you see the effects of the Spirit’s work. As to the mechanics of the new birth, it is unknown. We cannot tell how it happens. What we do see are the effects, the changes, the transformation of that unseen wind blowing into our lives.

That is perhaps why some translations use the word ‘wind’ for ‘spirit’. *Joh 3:8 The wind blows wherever it wants to. You hear it, but you don't know where it is coming from or where it is going. It is the same with everyone who is born from the Spirit.* ERV. This work of the Spirit cannot be contained or constrained by man. It is Divine procreation, begetting sons and daughters, *1Jn 5:18 We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.* It leads to a life and a change commensurate with that new life.

Whereas once we were dead in trespasses and sin, we have been brought to life in the spirit. *Eph 2:5 Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;).* So when is a person ‘born’? How would you know if you were ‘born again’? Since Jesus is using the analogy of birth, we might consider what this means in the natural and relate this to the spiritual. I do not know of anyone who remembers his or her natural birth. Despite some anecdotal claims to the contrary, research suggests that people aren't able to remember their births³. The inability to remember early childhood events before the age of 3 or 4, including birth, is called childhood or infantile amnesia.

³ <http://www.livescience.com/45731-can-people-remember-birth.html>

However that may be, there comes a point in time when we are aware that we are alive. If we had no physical record of when we were born, we could not deduce it from our present state. We might form an approximation of our birth date from various aspects of our lives (e.g. how old we look compared with others). We do however know that we are alive because of the ability to perceive the world around us. We know that there was a time when this was not possible but now it is and we are aware of our existence. We have proof of life.

Likewise the person in whose life the Spirit has 'blown' does not need to know when it occurred. I do not need to know my natural birth date to be able to experience or enjoy life. Likewise the date of my new birth is not critical to my appreciation of my new life in Christ, the reality that the birth has occurred. I do however, need to see that I am in that Kingdom, just as a person who is born in the natural sees the temporal kingdom around and about them. The person who is born again will recognise the Kingdom of God in his life. The 'born again' man will of course desire to see the proofs of life. It is the proof of that new life that confirms the new birth. Just as we inherit the characteristics, genetically speaking, from our natural parents, we expect to see the DNA of the Spirit in our lives. That is proof of life.

Let me make clear what I mean and suggest that there is a big difference between showing the Spirit IN our lives and the Spirit working around our lives. There are many who may exhibit some appearance of spirituality, who in reality lack the working of the Spirit in their lives. There are those people who call Jesus, Lord, but disobey Him. *Mat 7:21 Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Mat 7:22 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? Mat 7:23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.*

Now I do not see that the devil casts out devils, because that is a work of God. *Mar 3:22 And the scribes which came down from Jerusalem said, He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils. Mar 3:23 And he called them unto him, and said unto them in parables, **How can Satan cast out Satan?** Mar 3:24 And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand.* The works that Jesus addresses in the life of these people are works of God but that does not make the 'doers' of the works the children of God.

I might go so far as to say that manifestations of gifts and experiences are no proof of the Spiritual life. People who have such things are like a tree that has been hung with baubles, the baubles are not the natural product of that tree. The tree is merely the carrier of those things and it does not define the inner quality or nature of that tree. Gifts are like a uniform, epaulettes and badges. It is a lesson not to judge things according to outward appearances. For example, speaking in tongues (a gift) is not proof of a spiritual life.

If the Spirit is active in our lives, we shall produce fruit, fruit that is natural to that spiritual life. We shall be fruit trees producing the fruit of the Spirit. *Gal 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Gal 5:23 Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. Gal 5:24 And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.* If these are not produced then the life is questionable. These fruits are indicators of the inward

change brought about by the Spirit indwelling.

You will see in the context that the Spiritual fruit contrasts with the fruit of the flesh (what the flesh produces). The Spirit working through Christ makes us fruitful vines. *Joh 15:4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. Joh 15:5 I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.*

A man may by his intellect seem greatly knowledgeable in matters or religion, a great speaker but these are outward things and proof of nothing. Remember what happened to Charles Templeton, Billy Graham's fellow evangelist? Some people are called 'gifted' and are admired for that but it means nothing without that inner working of the Spirit. What the Spirit produces in the lives of believers is in reach of all believers. It comes from that relationship with Christ IN us through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The importance of the teaching of the 'new birth' lies in this. It is that the person making a claim to salvation must show the life of the Spirit in them. Herein is the mistake of what we have called 'easy believism', namely, if you accept Christ as Saviour, if you accept forgiveness, then that is all you need. A one off experience that sets you up forever and you need do no more. Never give it another thought, presume that everything is in place. Like buying a flight ticket, all you have to do is turn up at the airport on the day. However, it is not like that. I think that there must be many people walking this life thinking that they will be in the Kingdom, when they cannot even see it. They do not realise the changes that confirm the new life in them. They do not seek the signs of life, the proof of life.

Salvation may be made far too easy by today's evangelists who just focus on salvation. The so called 'Great Commission' did not focus on saving but on discipling. *Mat 28:19 Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples: baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Mat 28:20 and **teach them to obey everything I have commanded you.** And I will be with you always, to the end of the age."* Discipling is the process of education and training. It is building up the body of Christ but it is worthless apart from the new birth.

I had not come across anyone prior to my conversion and few since, who preached the necessity of the New Birth **BEFORE** starting a Christian walk. There it is, right at the start of John's Gospel which is for the purpose, *Joh 20:31 But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.* That new life starts with the work of the Spirit. All else that follows is meaningless and ineffectual without the new birth by the Spirit.

You may have been sprinkled, dedicated, confirmed, baptised but you will go to hell unless you are born again. If you talk to someone about Jesus, what is your focus? Is it about Him and Him in the life of the person that you are talking to? Why else talk to them? Is it to get them to become a Church attender, a member of a sect or institutionalised church? Is it about studying the Bible to know God, becoming educated in religion? All is of no avail without the new birth.

The 'new birth' marks the start of our transition, a transformation and the beginning of our

discipleship, the beginning of our new life IN Christ.

5. A child (Citizen of the Kingdom)

The study that we now embark upon will for many be problematic. I want to try and understand when the transition to Christ begins or can begin and where time finally runs out for a soul. Can we be saved early in life and if so, how early? Can people be saved late in life, if so how late and is there such a thing as a 'death bed conversion'? I have told you before about an 85 year gestation period for faith⁴.

Mr. Luke Short lived in Dartmouth England until he was 16 years old. Before leaving England he had seen Oliver Cromwell and witnessed the beheading of King Charles I. It was at this time he sailed for America. As an adult he travelled as a seaman for many years until his age prevented him from doing so any longer. Eventually he settled down and became a farmer in Middleborough, MA.

One day while working on his farm at the age of 100, he sat down to take a break from his labours. While sitting there alone he thought back through the many things he had experienced in life, particularly when he was young.

At some point he remembered listening to John Flavel preach when he was quite young, before he left England. As he remembered a message he heard some 85 years earlier a phrase came to memory that pastor Flavel had spoken... "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema maranatha (Eternally condemned)."

It was while reflecting on a message he had heard 85 years earlier... while sitting in a field an ocean away from his youth... that God saved him! He then united with First Congregational Church in Middleborough and lived to the age of 116. To God be the glory!

We can see in that tale that the Lord will save in His own time and that may be decades after the preacher is dead.

Why do we find it more acceptable to our senses to believe that God has more dealings with adults than the child, the infant and the unborn? Does God talk to the child and the unborn? This is a controversial subject because it also includes the question as to whether infants and the unborn can be saved. If as we have discussed already, the new birth is essential to the new life and that is a sovereign act of God, it is not bound by our actions.

I must also point out to those who espouse the idea that they are 'saved' and use that as some bench mark for Christianity, that 'salvation' is a process. Salvation is about calling, forgiveness, repentance, conversion, belief, sanctification and so on that issues in our total deliverance, that is, our salvation. It is from beginning to end an act of God not man. *Gal 1:4 Who gave himself for our sins, **that he might deliver us** from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father:* Salvation is not the start of your spiritual journey, it is the 'telos', the goal, the arrival point, *1Pe 1:7 These trials are so that the true metal of your faith (far more valuable than gold, which*

⁴ <https://pastorron7.wordpress.com/2009/02/12/amazing-conversion-story/>

*perishes though refined by fire) may come to light in praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Messiah Yeshua. 1Pe 1:8 Though you have not seen Him, you love Him. And even though you don't see Him now, you trust Him and are filled with a joy that is glorious beyond words, 1Pe 1:9 receiving the **outcome of your faith—the salvation of your souls**. TLV. We can ask ourselves that question now. "Where is our faith leading us in our daily life and practice?"*

I am not trying to undermine personal assurance. The work of Christ stands like a rock in the shoals of life. The truth is that none can pluck the true children of God from His hand. The question is, what makes you think that you are one of the people that Jesus is talking about? We are too quick to transfer a general statement into a personal condition, without examining the other factors commensurate with being 'saved'.

I do warn against the shallow 'believism' that has no roots and nothing to show of the work of the Spirit of God. It is not salvation, it is religion. I have met those who exclaimed that they were saved but like the seed on stony ground, whatever there was, shrivelled and died. Were they saved? They would have said yes at the start but they showed no desire for the words of God, less desire for Christian company and more for the world. Salvation was more an insurance policy than a way of life.

They did not endure to the end. Any life that they thought they had, withered and it did not concern them. *Mar 13:12 Now the brother shall betray the brother to death, and the father the son; and children shall rise up against their parents, and shall cause them to be put to death. Mar 13:13 And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but **he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved***. The Creator can start that process at any stage in our lives, even in the womb, as I will show.

I think that our attitude towards the unborn has been governed for too long by the irrational evolutionists. Let me explain what I mean. The evolutionist will never tell you how life develops from atoms to a self replicating machine, the basic cell. Evolutionists generally start there, with the cell. It is a fairy story that develops by assuming the existence of a cell. The first cell comes into existence 'once upon a time' and from then they apply the further magic of more time and chance to arrive at all of the varieties of life on Earth. There is of course nothing simple about a cell. It requires a minimum of 255 genes, which equates to a few million base pairs in the DNA strand. That is far from simple. It is incredibly complex.

To the evolutionist, the cell is not really worth consideration until it becomes the sort of creature that we can relate to, until it has evolved into a more complex creature. There is a similar attitude that sees the foetus as an undeveloped adult and it does not have real value until it is fully developed as to what we call 'a human being'. This is how abortion is justified. The unborn has no rights but the mother claims rights over her own body. Abortion by this argument becomes the right to kill an inconvenient clump of cells that develop in their bodies, just as they might assume the right to kill a cancer.

I do not believe that children become precious in the eyes of the Lord after birth. I believe that they have value before birth and it is because of this, I call those who deliberately abort their children, murderers. These tiny helpless mites deserve our help all the more because they are defenceless and I think that this is recognised in the Lex Talionis, *Exo 21:22 And when men fight, and they strike a*

*pregnant woman, and her child goes forth, and there is no injury, being fined he shall be fined. As much as the husband of the woman shall put on him, even he shall give through the judges. Exo 21:23 But if injury occurs, you shall give **life for life**, Exo 21:24 eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, Exo 21:25 branding for branding, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.* The men are punished even if the child is delivered early. Death of the mother or child was punished by death.

The pseudo science of the evolutionist has been grasped by many, and it suggests that the unborn or the infant is in some sort of limbo until it can communicate or show some intellect. That it only has 'religious' value when it can show another human being that it is a person like them. Up to that point it is like that 'simple cell', a blob of jello, of little value. Yet that is not the view of the Creator. *Psa 139:14 I praise you, because I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works, and my soul knows it well. Psa 139:15 My frame was not hidden from you, when I was created secretly, and intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Psa 139:16 Your eyes saw my embryo, and in your book they all were written—days fashioned for me when there was not one of them.* LEB.

How glorious is this? It is not just the parts list for my construction, there were also 'days fashioned for me'. Those very days that You Lord had considered that I should enjoy. My life was there in its entirety, whether short or long, laid out for me. I was with you in eternity when you planned me. What I would become, my genetic make up, my perfections and my imperfections were all meticulously drawn up and placed in the queue, ready for the day that I would start my journey into this life.

This is no less true of the life to come. *1Co 2:9 But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which **God hath prepared for them that love him**. Joh 14:2 In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. **I go to prepare a place for you.** Joh 14:3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. Joh 14:4 And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.* The Creator has planned the next phase of our life too.

No wonder the Psalmist exclaims, *Psa 139:17 And to me, how precious are your thoughts, O God; how vast is their sum.* LEB. How wonderful, how amazing, what joy it is that in all of this life You have thought about me and you have given it to me. Before I was assembled, I was precious, when I was assembled it was in the sight of God (not hidden from You). I was planned in eternity. **I always was a person.**

This leads us to a further consideration, namely that since I was always 'before the Lord', I always had value. When I am born I have value, as a child I am equally as important as a so called adult, if not more so as a child. In the religious world we tend to look up to intellect, knowledge, prowess, capability, yet it is to these little children that Our Lord turns, to set them forth as examples of the model citizen in the Kingdom of Heaven. The Apostles would have told the children to 'clear off' but not our Lord.

Perhaps this is why our Lord sets the child, not the Apostles as an example to the people. *Mat 18:2 And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, Mat 18:3 And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye **be converted, and become as little children**, ye **shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven**.* The child is fertile soil for the Gospel. It should be fed and watered. If parents could only see their child departing through the gates of Hell, it might spur them to greater action

but alas they do not. Jesus sees the importance of childhood faith and encourages us to see the same. *Mat 18:10 Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.* Children, rather than being an example of ignorance and insensitivity to the Gospel, are to the contrary, prime examples of how we should behave to God's word. They are more willing to take the Gospel in humility as befits a child of God. They do not raise the arguments and the objections of the older person. They do not need proofs to believe.

If the 'new birth' taught us the necessity of regeneration, to both see and enter the Kingdom of God, yet it is not enough. **We must enter as children.** "Except", that is unless, in no way, it is not possible that we can enter, without being as a child before our heavenly Father. It is without exception. Unless we are transformed into children we shall not enter God's Kingdom. It does not mean that we are 'childish' that we act in a foolish or careless manner. The emphasis is on simple trust.

While we are dealing with infants and children, I also point out that the sign of the covenant, namely circumcision, was also to be applied at the start of life. *Gen 17:10 This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised. Gen 17:11 And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you. Gen 17:12 And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed. Gen 17:13 He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. Gen 17:14 And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant.*

I do not intend to discuss the typological significance of circumcision, or whether it makes any justification for infant sprinkling. I merely observe that an infant is involved in a religious initiation before God that could hardly be accorded any value unless the Lord considered the infant as having some social, civil and moral value, in order to be included in rite of entry into the natural Israel. The child of days clearly had value in Israel.

Let us go back even further, before birth, to the period of gestation. We have suggested that the infant has value in the sight of God. What of the unborn? Is this more than just value in the anticipation of the finished product or does it extend to 'present value' of the unborn? Does the Spirit of God work in the lives of the unborn? Is spiritual life a reality at that early stage of development? Is it possible to know Christ before we are born? Many would say that the foetus is not a person but the scripture would say differently. Let us examine this from the scriptures.

In the sight of God, Rachel had not just two baby boys in her womb, she had two nations. *Gen 25:22 And the children struggled together within her; and she said, If it be so, why am I thus? And she went to enquire of the LORD. Gen 25:23 And the LORD said unto her, **Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger.** Gen 25:24 And when her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb. Gen 25:25 And the first came out red, all over like an hairy garment; and they called his name Esau. Gen 25:26 And after that came his brother out, and his hand took hold on Esau's heel; and his name was called Jacob: and Isaac was threescore years old when she bare them.*

Jacob had an innate sense of his own destiny, he knew, in some way that we cannot understand, that he was the one who would father the nation of Israel and in consequence reached out for his older brother's heel, as it were to pull him back and take his place. The Lord was clearly working in Jacob's life even when he was in the womb.

Samson's life was delineated from the womb. *Jdg 13:3 And the angel of the LORD appeared unto the woman, and said unto her, Behold now, thou art barren, and bearest not: but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son. Jdg 13:4 Now therefore beware, I pray thee, and drink not wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing: Jdg 13:5 For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head: for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb: and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.* It was to be expected that as he had begun in the womb, so he would continue but that is a study for another time.

For Hannah, the child's life was set even before he was conceived. *1Sa 1:11 And she vowed a vow, and said, O LORD of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head.* I wonder how many Christian parents ever give thought to dedicating their child to the Lord before conception and birth?

Jeremiah is another example of a life planned in eternity. *Jer 1:4 Then the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Jer 1:5 Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations. Jer 1:6 Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child. Jer 1:7 But the LORD said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak.* How the Lord must have delighted to visit Jeremiah and see his progress towards his life work? Perhaps Jeremiah was not always aware of the presence of God, perhaps at times he felt a sense of destiny but whether conscious or not, the Lord was with him.

Moving into the NT we have another wonderful example of self-consciousness in the womb. It is John the Baptist, another Nazarite *Luk_1:15 For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb.* This is one of the most remarkable statements in the Bible. It shows that an unborn child can be filled with the Spirit of God. This child is a work of God and born of the Spirit. We shall DV return to look at the work of the Spirit but here I make a point that when God fills people with His Spirit it is of immediate utility.

Bezaleel, the craftsman of the Tabernacle did not receive the filling of the Spirit to be inactive. *Exo 35:31 And he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom and with skill and with knowledge and with every kind of craftsmanship, Exo 35:32 And to devise curious works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, Exo 35:33 And in the cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of wood, to make any manner of cunning work.*

This self-consciousness or awareness is further witnessed when John's mother Elizabeth in her third trimester meets Mary who is in her first trimester. *Luk 1:41 And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: Luk 1:42 And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and*

*blessed is the fruit of thy womb. Luk 1:43 And whence is this to me, that **the mother of my Lord** should come to me? Why did John leap in the womb? It was recognition of the baby Jesus in Mary's womb. Both Elizabeth and her unborn were filled with the Holy Spirit. They were sensitive to the things of God.*

Timothy was brought up in the faith. *2Ti 3:15 And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus....2Ti 1:5 When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; **and I am persuaded that in thee also.***

For some souls, it may be that they never knew when they 'became a Christian'. To them it was always part of their life. They always believed, they accepted as children, like children, the words of God. They transitioned to greater awareness of the work of Christ and with each step obeyed the will of God.

This raises another important point. Do we make a choice 'for Christ', to 'accept Christ' or do we decide to 'reject Christ'? I believe that not only do we come to a point in life when become committed to Christ, there comes a time when we might, God forbid, reject Christ. *Heb 10:26 For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, Heb 10:27 But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. Heb 10:28 He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Heb 10:29 Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, **who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?***

You may remember Charles Templeton the evangelist who rejected Christianity. He said, "I believe that there is no supreme being with human attributes—no God in the biblical sense—but that all life is the result of timeless evolutionary forces ... over millions of years." 'I believe that, in common with all living creatures, we die and cease to exist as an entity.' He rejected Christ.

Because children are fertile ground for the Gospel, they are to be encouraged in the things of God from their earliest days. They are ripe for transformation if indeed the process has not already started in them. Starting at the beginning of life, we see that parents are co-workers with the Lord to bring children up in righteousness. For many, the idea of dedicating a child to the Lord, is to let the Lord do the work and pass over all responsibility to Him. It is not only lazy, it is deceitful. It is deceiving yourself that God will bless your negligence. If you are not prepared to put the effort into your child's life you can make no complaint that the Lord does nothing for you. If you pray for daily bread, then you also make an effort to do something about it, because if you do nothing you will starve. If you do not bring your children up in the Lord, you are starving them of spiritual input.

So this is what the Lord requires. *Deu 6:6 And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: Deu 6:7 And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. Deu 6:8 And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. Deu 6:9 And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.*

This immersion in the Word of God is part of the transition process. It carries with it a promise. *Pro 22:6 Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.* I think that many parents do not see the importance of this. They think that it is not exciting enough, it is too boring for the child and so would prefer to read them fairy stories instead of God's word. I think the fault lies with the parent's who do not see the excitement and glory in the things of God. They do not excite the child to see the possibilities of a life with Christ. *Pro 1:8 My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother: Pro 1:9 For they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck.*

Children come from our Creator and it is our duty to do everything to keep them with the Creator.

6. Robber on the Cross (death bed repentance)

We have established that our God can and does work from the womb in the life of man and today we shall observe His workings at the edge of the grave. Australia's most celebrated bush ranger, Ned Kelly, was subject to Methodist influence through the series of death row visits he received from Wesleyan Methodist preacher John Cowley Coles in September and October 1880. Not to be put off by the Governor of the gaol who informed him that 'Kelly is a Catholic and has his own minister', Coles persevered until he was kneeling and praying beside Kelly in his cell.

In the earliest Methodist tradition of accompanying prisoners to the gallows, as Charles Wesley and others had done on numerous occasions at Tyburn, Coles urged repentance upon Kelly. 'I refused to hear anything from him about his bush ranging exploits, but I kept him to this, that he was sure to be executed on a certain day, and that he was a sinner standing in need of a Saviour.' (To the Methodist preacher no one was beyond redemption.) They knelt and prayed together and upon standing Kelly crossed himself and thanked the preacher for his ministry. This was the last time the two men spoke together and Kelly went to the gallows on 11th November. Here is a touching and little known portrait of an instance of pastoral care in a moment of personal crisis. Kelly, the penitent Catholic (sic!) Christian, and perhaps Australia's favourite wayward son, kneels beside Coles the forthright Wesleyan preacher, the two men together calling upon God to grant mercy to a fallen sinner.

We shall find out how effective John Coles was when we get to glory but for many cynics, a death bed repentance is not genuine. It is a product of fear and desperation, trying to extricate the soul from the possibility that what everyone said about Hell is true.

How a man faces death is an intriguing subject. There was the banal exchange between Stan Laurel, the comedian and his nurse, oblivious of what was to come. He died a few days after a heart attack on February 23rd 1965, and was a gag man until the very end. Just minutes away from his death, he said to his nurse that he wouldn't mind going skiing at that very moment. The nurse replied that she wasn't aware that he was a skier. "I'm not," said Stan, "but I'd rather be doing that than have all these needles stuck into me!" A Few minutes later, when the nurse looked in on him, he was gone.

There was a far more frightening departure for Jim Taylor, the leader of the Exclusive Brethren when he died in 1970. His manner of conduct over that last year of his life had been worse than an unbeliever. At his death bed, someone observed, "He was quieter for some moments, then just before he died there came upon him an almost indescribable horror, the expression on his face was

one of abject terror. He opened his mouth to speak, however he did not actually say anything, his breathing very laboured, and erratic. It was in this state that he died. "It was clear to all present that something was revealed to Jim that caused such terror. Only he and the Lord know what it was."

Thomas Payne the leading atheistic writer in American colonies approaching death, cried: "Stay with me, for God's sake; I cannot bear to be left alone, O Lord, help me! O God, what have I done to suffer so much? What will become of me hereafter? "I would give worlds if I had them, that The Age of Reason had never been published. O Lord, help me! Christ, help me! ...No, don't leave; stay with me! Send even a child to stay with me; for I am on the edge of Hell here alone. If ever the Devil had an agent, I have been that one."

How much more triumphant is the passing of a Christian.

D L. Moody once said, "Some day you will read in the papers that D.L. Moody, of East Northfield, is dead. Don't you believe a word of it! At that moment I shall be more alive than I am now. I shall have gone up higher, that is all; gone out of this old clay tenement into a house that is immortal, a body that death cannot touch, that sin cannot taint, a body like unto His own glorious body." When the time eventually came, he is recorded as saying, "Is this dying? Why this is bliss. There is no valley. I have been within the gates. Earth is receding; Heaven is opening; God is calling; I must go." And when he went away from them for a little time and came back, he said that he had seen his loved ones in Heaven, giving their names, and when it was suggested that he had been dreaming, he assured them it was not so, but that he had actually been within the gates of Heaven. Thus his noble life went out".

The death bed tends to reflect the nature of the life lived but there are few records of a sinner coming to Christ at the last minute of life. Be that as it may, it must never be ruled out. Charles Wesley learned a lesson of hope through his visitation of prisoners condemned to death.

Charles Wesley's work in the summer of 1738 was not restricted to the domestic circle and the London churches. On July 10th, at the request of Mr. Sparks, who was one of the visiting ministers of Newgate, he went to the prison with Mr. Bray and Mr. Burnham, and preached to ten men who were under sentence of death. He did so with a heavy heart. His old prejudices against the possibility of a death-bed repentance still hung upon him, and he hardly hoped that there could be mercy for those whose time was so short. He says, 'But in the midst of my languid discourse a sudden spirit of faith came upon me, and I promised them all pardon, in the name of Jesus Christ, if they would then, as at the last hour, repent and believe the gospel. Nay, I did believe they would accept of the proffered mercy, and could not help telling them, I had no doubt but God would give me every soul of them.'

The next day he preached with earnestness to the prisoners again, and he saw that one or two of them were deeply affected. From that time he redoubled his efforts to lead the condemned men to Christ, and he did not labour in vain. One of them was a Negro, who, under the terrible laws of that time, had been sentenced to death for robbing his master. He was sick, and separated from the other prisoners, being confined in 'the condemned hole'. Charles Wesley was moved by his sorrow and earnest desire of Christ

Jesus. On July 15th he had the joy of knowing that his 'poor happy black' believed that 'the Son of God loved him, and gave Himself for him'. The 'condemned hole' became the scene of great rejoicing.

As the day of execution approached two of the other prisoners came into the place, and Charles Wesley and James Hutton conversed with them, and saw them moving towards the Cross. On the night before the execution Charles Wesley and Bray were locked into a cell with the men who were to suffer on the morrow. A change had come over the little company. When Wesley had administered the Communion to the condemned men, having previously instructed them in the nature of it, one of them had found perfect peace; others, at intervals, had seen, by faith, the Saviour crucified for them. Joy was visible on all faces. After wrestling in mighty prayer, they sang the hymn written by the father of the Wesleys :

Behold the Saviour of mankind
Nailed to the shameful tree !
How vast the love that Him inclined
To bleed and die for thee !

Charles Wesley declared that it was one of the most triumphant hours he had ever known. The next day, Wednesday, July 19th, the men were executed at Tyburn. The scene must be depicted in Charles Wesley's own words. He says, "I rose very heavy, and backward to visit them for the last time. At six I prayed and sang with them all together. The ordinary⁵ would have read prayers, and preached most miserably. Mr. Sparks and Mr. Broughton were present. I felt my heart full of tender love to the latter. He administered. All the ten received. Then he prayed and I after him. At half-hour past nine their irons were knocked off and their hands tied. I went in a coach with Sparks, Washington, and a friend of Newington's (N. himself not being permitted). By half-hour past ten we came to Tyburn, waited till eleven; then were brought the children appointed to die. I got upon the cart with Sparks and Broughton; the ordinary endeavoured to follow, when the poor prisoners begged he might not come; and the mob kept him down.

I prayed first, then Sparks and Broughton. We had prayed before that our Lord would show there was a power superior to the fear of death. Newington had quite forgot his pain. They were all cheerful; full of comfort, peace, and triumph; assuredly persuaded Christ had died for them, and waited to receive them into paradise. Greenaway was impatient to be with Christ. The black had spied me coming out of the coach, and saluted me with his looks. As often as his eyes met mine he smiled with the most composed, delightful countenance I ever saw. Read caught hold of my hand in a transport of joy. Newington seemed perfectly pleased. Hudson declared he was never better, or more at ease, in mind and body. None showed any natural terror of death; no fear, or crying, or tears. All expressed their desire of our following them to paradise. I

⁵ a prelate exercising original jurisdiction over a specified territory or group <The ordinary of a diocese is a bishop.> (2) : a clergyman appointed formerly in England to attend condemned criminals

never saw such calm triumph, such incredible indifference to dying. We sang several hymns, particularly : “Behold the Saviour of mankind, Nailed to the shameful tree!” and the hymn entitled ' Faith in Christ,' which conclude? : “A guilty, weak, and helpless worm. Into Thy hands I fall; Be Thou my life, my righteousness. My Jesus, and my all.”

We prayed Him, in earnest faith, to receive their spirits. I could do nothing but rejoice ; kissed Newington and Hudson ; took leave of each in particular. Mr. Broughton bade them not to be surprised when the cart should draw away. They cheerfully replied they should not; expressed some concern how we should get back to our coach. We left them going to meet their Lord, ready for the Bridegroom. When the cart drew off, not one stirred, or struggled for life, but meekly gave up their spirits. Exactly at twelve they were turned off. I spoke a few suitable words to the crowd, and returned, full of peace and confidence in our friends' happiness. That hour under the gallows was the most blessed hour of my life”.

It was under such circumstances that Charles Wesley first met the wild English mob, and commenced his work as a 'field-preacher. His few suitable words spoken to the crowd prefaced a series of fervent appeals subsequently made by him in the open air in many parts of England. Not only so. The experiences through which he passed, when face to face with men standing on the brink of eternity, awoke in him the passion of the evangelist. Prejudice disappeared, hesitation ended ; there was nothing left but to test the truth of the doctrine, which had come to him suffused with new light, that by faith, by faith only, a penitent sinner is reconciled to God.

Is this death bed repentance or not? Well of course it is but what is wrong with that? It perfectly illustrates the nature of God’s vineyard. If we serve long or short the Master is just. *Mat 20:1 For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. Mat 20:2 And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. Men came all through the day and at its end they stood to get their wages.*

Mat 20:8 So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. Mat 20:9 And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. Mat 20:10 But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. Mat 20:11 And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house, Mat 20:12 Saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day. Mat 20:13 But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Mat 20:14 Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Mat 20:15 Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good? Whether we have much time to serve in the vineyard or not is irrelevant.

The most extreme case of ‘death bed’ repentance that we find in scripture concerns the two thieves on the cross. Here we have two reprobates that have finally been brought to civil justice. Exactly what they did remains unknown to us but according to the law in their day, they must die. In so

doing, they become part of the most important execution in History. I wonder if they would have even been able to comprehend the significance of what was happening?

I see them cursing on their way to their execution. Bloodied and bruised from the beatings they had received, because death was not going to be made easy or humane by Rome. With them staggers a man dressed up as a king, with a crown of thorns, a man weakened from the beatings He too had received but which He did not deserve. They pass through the crowds, some jeering, some relieved that these robbers would rob no more and others just looked on at the spectacle. The trail of blood leads to the execution mound and they scream and curse the louder as the nails are driven in. The man between them is silent as a lamb to the slaughter as He too is nailed to His cross. Then they are tipped upright and with a judder as the pole hits the bottom of the socket, begin their ordeal, the morning sun rising quickly upon them.

The thieves continue to vent their spleen. They even turn upon Jesus, *Mat 27:43 He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God. Mat 27:44 **The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth.*** Then something quite remarkable happens in those three hours before the middle of the day. One of the thieves quiets down and his attitude changes. He sees the Man in the middle in a different light. One minute it was railing, the next it was the realisation that this Man in the middle could save him, if not from this agony certainly the agony to come.

There was no formal evangelism from Jesus, no call to repentance, no offer of salvation, no water baptism, he could not get down on his knees, in fact **no request for this sinner to do anything**. Yet something had happened to the sinner. It is what I believe happens to each and every believer. *Gal 1:15 But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, Gal 1:16 **To reveal** (ἀποκαλύπτω - apokaluptō) **his Son in me**, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood:* It pleased God at that late hour to revealed Jesus to the thief also. It was an apocalypse, taking the lid off, disclosing Christ to him.

His heart and mind had been turned. He now looked to Jesus for any future. **He desired Jesus**. It was only belief, faith that this Man who was the King of the Jews, King of a Kingdom. When everything was shutting down in his life, when he could just about move his tongue, he appealed to Jesus. Jesus in response promises that they would be together in Paradise that same day.

So what did it take to be saved? **He asked simply not to be forgotten.** *Luk 23:42 And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.* He did not say "Lord save me", he did not say "Lord forgive me", he did not say "Lord deliver me", he does not say "I give my heart to you". There were none of the words suggested by the evangelists that we noted in an earlier ministry, "We suggest praying the following prayer to accept Christ as your Saviour: Dear Lord Jesus, I know I am a sinner, and I ask for your forgiveness. I believe you died for my sins and rose from the dead. I trust and follow you as my Lord and Saviour. Or, Lord Jesus, I repent of my sins. Come into my heart. I make you my Lord and Saviour". Those are good things if they happened to you but the words do not make it happen to the insincere person.

There was none of this on the cross because there are no 'magic' words, religious formulas that will save you, if that desire for Christ is not in your heart. No ritual ever saved a person who does not want Christ above all else. If you do not want to be where Jesus is, what do you want Him for?

Modern evangelism tries to generate a response that it fills with its own solution to the problem it engineered. Evangelism tries to create a need that it will satisfy with its own response. It knows what it wants to achieve, namely some sort of commitment and it directs itself to that end. Success is measured by the number that respond to 'giving yourself to Jesus', getting saved.

I am not saying that a relationship with Christ is without emotion, deep emotion. I am not denying that Christianity involves a commitment. I am not saying that we do not need to repent and be saved by Christ. What I am saying is this, that if the need for Christ is generated by a man and not by Christ it will fail. If we try to build a church that Christ said that He would build, we are not doing the work of God. Evangelism is about encouraging Christ in us. Paul labours to see Christ formed in us, not about a decision to just accept His benefits. *Gal 4:19 My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you.* Christ in you the hope of Glory.

We are in danger of giving people assurance **without** any process of change occurring in the individual. We tell people that they are saved because they did what they were told to do, not because anything supernatural occurred **IN their lives**. If we are satisfied that a person getting out of their seat after an evangelists appeal and coming up to an altar rail, making a profession of belief, is the same as being born again, is the same as a supernatural change in that person, Christ in them, then we are on dangerous ground. That is why this happens⁶:

.... in a 1990 interview with PBS, Billy Graham himself stated his belief that only about 25% of those who come forward at one of his events actually became Christians. In recent years, studies have shown that only 6% of people who "come forward" at an evangelistic crusade are any different in their beliefs or behaviour one year later.

The sinner on the Cross now sees this man, this abandoned stranger next to him as Saviour (Jesus) and Lord. That is what we all need to see. You do not see that **without** some great transformation occurring in the heart. What is the answer of a heart that has this new life? It is this and I will expand the thought. **All that he wanted as a result of his encounter with Jesus was to spend eternity with Him. Simply that. He wanted to go with Him, to be with Him. To be with Him was to be in Paradise.** Is that our true desire? Do we want Jesus for who He is, rather than for what He gives? Do we want Him just for our own selfish ends, to satisfy our needs or because He is altogether lovely? Do we really love Him for who He is?

There are people that I have met, people who call themselves Christians who have shied away from this idea. They want salvation, much later of course, when they have eked out their selfish life, but they do not want Christ at the heart of their lives now. How do I know that? I know it because they cannot call Him Lord, because He is not the centre of their lives about which all must rotate. They disobey Him because they do not value Him. A saved man values his Saviour for what Jesus is in Himself, not for what he can get out of Him.

The man on the cross' remains were thrown in a cart and he was dumped with his unbelieving companion in an unmarked grave, known only to God but his spirit was far away in another dimension where time did not exist. What was his name? It was your name and my name. We too who railed against Christ, who sinned against man and God, were going to the same end as he was.

⁶ <https://redeeminggod.com/crusade-evangelism-effective/>

We were heading from justice to Hell, we were going to suffer for our crimes but for the grace and mercy of Christ on the Cross.

Every one of us humans will end up on one side of the Cross or the other. We will continue railing and cursing into the grave or we will be with Jesus in Paradise. If ever there was a day to die and a person to die with, this robber had been given the best, A few days later, he would have been killed without hope, a few days earlier he would have died without hope, but this day in the midst of pain and suffering, it is for him a perfect day. As the Lakota Sioux Native Americans say, "It was a good day to die".

We never knew his name but Jesus did and whatever happened to his body, He knew that also. Is this a death bed repentance or not? Well of course it is but what is wrong with that? As we have said, it perfectly illustrates the nature of God's vineyard. *Mat 20:1 For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. Mat 20:2 And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard.* In the Creator's grand scheme it matters not when you come but that you came.

That great truth also stands that while there is life there is always hope.

<p>Mat 27:38 Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left. Mat 27:39 And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads,</p> <p>Mat 27:41 Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, Mat 27:42 He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. Mat 27:43 He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God. Mat 27:44 The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth.</p> <p>Mat 27:45 Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour. Mat 27:46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?</p>	<p>Mar 15:25 And it was the third hour, and they crucified him. Mar 15:26 And the superscription of his accusation was written over, THE KING OF THE JEWS.</p> <p>Mar 15:27 And with him they crucify two thieves; the one on his right hand, and the other on his left. Mar 15:28 And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And he was numbered with the transgressors.</p> <p>Mar 15:33 And when the sixth hour was come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.</p> <p>Mar 15:34 And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?</p>	<p>Luk 23:33 And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left.</p> <p>Luk 23:39 And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. Luk 23:40 But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? Luk 23:41 And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. Luk 23:42 And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. Luk 23:43 And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.</p> <p>Luk 23:44 And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour.</p>	<p>Joh 19:31 The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. Joh 19:32 Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him. Joh 19:33 But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs: Joh 19:34 But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water.</p>
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7. Damascus Road (apocalypse)

We have often heard the phrase, “Damascus road experience” to describe a sudden change of attitude and direction in a person’s life. Something happens to them that make them become a completely different person. It is sometimes related to a ‘blinding light’ experience, a moment of revelation that leaves them, as some would say, ‘converted’. This happens to many Christians but it is not stated that all will be changed by a ‘blinding light’ experience.

It is of course a reference to the events surrounding Saul’s journey to Damascus as he pursues his vendetta against the Christians. Christ suddenly appears to Saul and his life is forever changed. Saul’s former life is proof that being ultra-religious, ultra-orthodox, like the High priest, is no proof of life. Yet I suggest that Saul’s former life is so crafted that it is essential to what he was to become. We learn more about this man than any other disciple in the NT and we are told:

- *Act 22:2 (And when they heard that he spake in the Hebrew tongue to them, they kept the more silence: and he saith,) Act 22:3 I am verily a man which am **a Jew, born in Tarsus**, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city **at the feet of Gamaliel**, and taught according to the perfect manner of the **law of the fathers**, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day. Act 22:4 And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women.*
- *Gal 1:14 And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of **the traditions of my fathers**. Gal 1:15 But when it pleased God, **who separated me from my mother's womb**, and called me by his grace, Gal 1:16 To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood:*
- *Act 22:27 Then the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea. Act 22:28 And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, **But I was free born**.*
- *Php 3:5 **Circumcised the eighth day**, of the stock of Israel, of **the tribe of Benjamin**, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, **a Pharisee**; Php 3:6 Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; **touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless**.*

There we have the curriculum vitae of Saul. If there was any person on the planet in those days that could stand as an example of a righteous, obedient life, it was Saul. If getting into favour with God was a matter of personal zeal and obedience, Saul was a perfect example. Saul probably thought that he had earned a lot of good points with God and that he would at the end of his life have been welcomed into Glory by God Himself, grateful for what he had done for Judaism. Nothing however could be farther from the truth.

This is a lesson for all who think that we can work our way into God’s good book. It is a lesson for those who think that by obeying the 10 commands, putting the Sermon on the Mount into practice, living the beatitudes, is all that Christianity requires. It is the idea that we can transform ourselves by dint of hard work. Émile Coué, the French psychologist, introduced a popular method of psychotherapy and self-improvement based on optimistic autosuggestion. If you said, “Every day, in every way, I'm getting better and better” about 20 times a day, your life would improve. It is totally contrary to the Gospel. The idea that you can begin to even think of transformation without being born again is contrary to the Gospel and is a sinful idea altogether.

In the natural, we would have thought that Saul was a lost cause as far as conversion was concerned. He was set in his ways, *Pro 22:6 Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.* Paul was indoctrinated, pickled in Judaism, frozen in his beliefs, set hard in his ways. How do you transform someone like that? The answer is that you cannot because it requires a mighty act of God.

Saul was well schooled in the Torah, yet for all his learning, he had not understood what was at its very core. Saul thought that the Law was a thing in itself, an end in itself not a means to an end. As Jesus observed, *Joh 5:39 Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. Joh 5:40 And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.* Some of the Jews saw the Law, the scriptures, as a way of deliverance. They sought life through works, through the doing of the word. It led to the idea of being right with God by doing the works of the Law. This is called Righteousness by Works and it is a lesson that Paul will learn, learn well and teach others, that it is impossible, *Gal 2:16 Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.* The law does not even help you obey its requirements.

It was a lesson that a German monk would rediscover⁷.

Luther's struggle with God came to a head as he was wrestling with this *Rom 1:17 For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.* He tells us that he was extremely zealous to understand Romans but that this phrase about God's righteousness stood in the way. This phrase, which to us is so clearly good news, was for Luther bad news. Why? Because the phrase "the righteousness of God" like most Biblical terms (e.g., grace, faith, justification, etc.) had been reinterpreted by scholastic theologians of the high and late Middle Ages 1100-1500 A.D. (esp. Gabriel Biel, Duns Scotus, Peter Lombard, Thomas Aquinas) to support a theology of Law and works. For centuries the Church had taught that the righteousness of God was God's active, personal righteousness or justice by which he punishes the unrighteous sinner.

This, Luther informs us, is what he had learned. Therefore whenever he came across the phrase "the righteousness of God" in Scripture, it terrified him ("struck my conscience like lightning," "was like a thunderbolt in my heart") because he knew that he was an unrighteous sinner who fell far short of God's righteous (perfect) demands.

Even worse, *Rom. 1:17*, filled Luther with anger and hatred toward God. "I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners." Is it not enough", Luther tells us he murmured, "that God crushes us miserable sinners with His law that He has to threaten us with punishment through the Gospel, too?"

After meditating day and night, finally the breakthrough came when Luther gave heed to the words at the end of *1:17*, "He who through faith is righteous shall live." Then he realized that the verse was not talking about the active righteousness that God

⁷ <http://www.trinitylutheranms.org/MartinLuther/TowerExperience.html>

demands, but the passive righteousness that He freely gives to those who believe the Gospel. The sinner is justified (declared righteous) by God through faith in the work and death of Jesus, not by our work or keeping of the Law. Put another way, the sinner is justified by receiving (faith) rather than achieving (works). Later Luther would say that we are saved by the alien righteousness of Christ, not by a righteousness of our own doing.

At the heart of this attitude is the idea of righteousness by works. It is implied that we are not really that bad, we are not totally spoiled, not very sinful, not totally out of communion with God and that if we make an effort, we can get into His good books. People who have this attitude believe that with a bit of effort you can dig yourself out of the hole you were born in. You are not ruined, only in need of a bit of repair, but that as we saw with the new birth, is all part of the devil's lie. It breeds Pharisaism of the highest order. Saul may well have ended up as a great Rabbi had he not made that fateful journey to Damascus.

The transformation of Saul to Paul, is I think, one common to us all. It is about getting rid of self-righteousness. Every one of us is self-righteous up to the point that we acknowledge our sinfulness before God and our total inability to redeem ourselves. We get in to the position where we see that we must accept another person's work to bring forgiveness, we see that we are in desperate need of a Saviour, we are totally lost unless Christ rescues us and imputes to us His righteousness.

This 'righteousness' becomes a major theme in Paul's writings particularly in the epistle to the Romans where the word occurs 39 times. In his letter to the Philippians he says, *Php 3:8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, Php 3:9 And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:* Paul's transition is from his self-righteous Pharisaism to righteousness by faith in Christ. It is God declaring Paul right with Himself, Paul justified before God, justified by faith. *Rom 5:1 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:*

How did Paul arrive at this moment in His life? Saul's transition to Paul is probably quite understandable to most of us. If you think back in your own life, that is if you were not in Christ at a young age, you may recall your own hostility to Christianity. How the Name of 'Jesus' was just an oath, a swear word, how Christians were a joke, Christ was no one special, how you were annoyed if these people suggested that you needed forgiving of your sin. How on any occasion you might use opportunity to belittle, provoke or be vindictive to Christians because you were at enmity with God. Perhaps you see it clearly now for what it was. Saul did not at first and it took a powerful event to make him change his world view.

It was Stephen's defence of the Christian faith that really disturbed the Jews. *Act 6:11 Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God. Act 6:12 And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council, Act 6:13 And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: Act 6:14 For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the*

customs which Moses delivered us. Act 6:15 And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.

When they executed Stephen, Saul was involved and he went on to harass Christianity. *Act 9:1 And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, Act 9:2 And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.* Christianity was a challenge to Judaism and as with any ideological challenge the extreme way to deal with it is not to argue against it, it is to exterminate it. This Saul undertook with relish.

What provoked this rage in Saul? We might think that it was satanic but that is not the whole picture. Christ was the one Saul persecuted, through His servants and especially Stephen. The Gospel was like an insect that kept stinging Saul, or a whip upon an oxen's back, that directed him to where he did not want to go. Paul was fighting against Christ and it hurt.

We are taught that men's hearts are desperately wicked. *Jer 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?* Yet it seems to me that some are so obdurate that it requires an earthquake to wake them up to life as we shall see with the Philippian jailor.

Paul describes what happened on the Damascus road to King Agrippa, *Act 26:13 At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. Act 26:14 And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.*

We might pause for a moment and ask why did the Lord Jesus not deal with Saul's conspirators in the same manner? Why not rescue Gamaliel, the High Priest and all the other Pharisaical Jews that resisted the Gospel? Did Stephen really have to die to bring Saul to Christ? The thing that we have to realise and accept in all of this is that it is not our script. It is not given to us to write 'happy endings'.

What we are told is this, *Act 9:15 But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:* That is all that we need to know. Like Jacob, he was one of God's elect. *Rom 9:11 (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;).*

Jesus had many confrontations with the Pharisees during His ministries. It is quite likely that Saul as he was then, had heard of Jesus but the confrontation was delayed. However, it is my opinion that Pharisaism never died out and that it still exists in the churches today. Here are the traits of the Pharisee.

Pharisees glory in righteousness, but it is self-righteousness, consequently they do not associate with sinners. Jesus calls them blind leaders of the blind, hypocrites, merciless, unjust, hard hearted, who say one thing and do another but at the same time condemning people for what they themselves do. They get pleasure out of burdening souls not helping them, consequently they make them more fitted for hell than they were before, because they do not care for sinners. The Pharisees did not care for their relatives, yet they loved money and took advantage of the poor. They hated the

prophets of old who they murdered, because they are motivated by hatred and jealousy, consequently they persecute people who do not do as they say.

As to their general conduct, they emphasised their position by dressing differently and making an outward show of their religion, especially praying in public and it gives them pleasure to receive public praise and honour from men in return. They love 'epaulettes', titles and honours bestowed by men. Being better than other men, they are hyper-critical, ever watchful to trap others in what they speak, yet while they are jealous for tradition, they put it above the Word of God. Jesus views Pharisaism as satanism, because the devil is their father. They love the minutiae of the law but neglect the big issues, straining at gnats and swallowing camels. Of such was our dear Apostle and who better you might think to send against the Jews and counter all their arguments? Not so. Jesus was not going to create a debating society, there is nothing to debate. Let Peter, a simple Galilean fisherman deal with Jews and Paul with the Gentiles, it would be the making of them both. You can see that Paul had to have an amazing transformation, to offload this Jewish heritage. It was all that he knew and the change would be like a full frontal lobotomy.

What might we observe in this transformation? Saul was one of history's most despicable characters, without any redeeming features. He was a nasty, vindictive, spiteful, brutal murderer. There was nothing in him to commend him to the Lord. He was not converted on the Damascus Road because of anything in him that was worth saving. This transformation is an act of the pure grace of God. *Gal 1:15 But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, Gal 1:16 To reveal* (ἀποκαλύπτω - apokaluptō) **his Son in me**, *that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood:* This was the apocalypse in Paul's life and all that the Lord had done, separating him at birth for this moment in time, calling him by pure grace and uncovering Christ to him and in him comes to fruition.

Should we all expect a 'Damascus Road' experience? Something must happen to us that shocks us out of our sinful complacency. It must be more than just reading that 'Christ died for sinners'. It must be the experience that he died for me. There must come a time when Christ is revealed in us, for if Christ is not, then we are utterly lost. I do not think that evangelism really considers the internal, experiential, subjective realisation of Christ. It concentrates on the external realisation that Christ forgives sinners, without necessarily, the reality of the personal meeting with Christ. We might associate with a particular group because we believe what they teach, that is objective truth but it is a world away from that truth springing to life in the soul. Saul met Christ and became a different person, Paul, because he met Jesus for real.

I believe that this transformation was so disturbing that it took a while to come to terms with it. *Gal 1:17 Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. Gal 1:18 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days.....Gal 2:1 Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with me also.* A period of about seventeen years passes before Paul launches out on what we call his first missionary journey. Paul still needed preparing. Once we meet Jesus we may have a totally different path in life, a complete change in direction but it does not necessarily mean that we are fit for our main purpose.

There came a day when Paul saw his old life, this life, for what it was. Dung. He turns his back on it for good and flushes it into the sewer of life, *Php 3:8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and **do count them but dung**, that I may win Christ.* This is another transformation in life, when we realise that this life carries no lasting value. We learn that truth, as to where we can safely store treasure *Mat 13:45 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Mat 13:46 Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.*

Why then if Paul flushed his natural life into the sewer of the world, do we keep playing in that sewer? Perhaps this is why some have made a distinction and called Saints people who left an extraordinary legacy because of their faith. Somehow, they were 'better', more holy, more committed than the mass of Christianity. They alone have the right and title to be a Saint. I disagree with this. I disagree because we should all as Christians have the same attitude as Paul regarding this life. For all we did it is worthless compared to the glory of Christ.

Part of Paul's transformation was to jettison his Pharisaism, his holier than thou attitude, his self-righteousness, to reach down into the sewer of life, in humility and start dragging men out of it. Whereas once he would not have lifted a finger, now he would give his life to save others. *Act 26:16 But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; Act 26:17 Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, Act 26:18 **To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.***

Paul does not lounge about, relax in his new found faith, do nothing, just become an impotent member of a self-congratulatory impotent church. He wants others to have what he has been given. He is on a Mission, he is a missionary. Paul now labours for his old enemy Jesus such that others would have that reality of Christ revealed in them, *Col 1:27 To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is **Christ in you**, the hope of glory:* Paul sees his only value in life as being of service to the people of God. This is how he puts it, *Php 1:21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. Php 1:22 But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. Php 1:23 For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: Php 1:24 Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.*

As Paul writes his own epitaph, the transformation started on the Damascus road is now complete. *2Ti 4:6 For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. 2Ti 4:7 I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, **I have kept the faith:** 2Ti 4:8 Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and **not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.*** Faithful Paul's epitaph can be ours too.

A timeline of Paul's service.

A.D. 34	37	46-47	48-49	50	51-53	53-54	54-57	57	57-59	59-60	60-62	62-66	66-67
Conversion Damascus Arabia	Jerusalem Visit Tarsus, Syria, Cilicia	Antioch, Relief Visit Jerusalem	First Missionary Journey & Antioch	Jerusalem Council & Antioch	Second Missionary Journey	Antioch	Third Missionary Journey	Jerusalem Arrest	Caesarea Prisoner	Journey to Rome	Rome House Arrest	Fourth Missionary Journey	Arrest Rome Martyred
ACTS 9		11	13-14	15	16-18		19-21	22-23	24-26	27-28	28		
3 Years Arabia	1 year Antioch				18 months Corinth		3 Years Ephesus		2 Years		2 Years		
LETTERS			Galatians		1 Thessalonians 2 Thessalonians		1 Corinthians 2 Corinthians Romans				Ephesians Colossians Philemon Philippians	1 Timothy Titus	2 Timothy
ROMAN EMPERORS													
Tiberius --- Caligula --- Claudius --- Nero													
ROMAN PROCURATORS													
Tiberius Alexander													
Venditidius Cumanus													
Antonius Felix (wife, Drusilla)													
Porcius Festus													
ROMAN PROCONSULS													
Sergius Paulus Proconsul of Cyprus													
Gallio Proconsul of Achaia													
MAJOR EVENTS													
Herod Agrippa persecutes the church													
Caligula orders his image set up and worshiped at Jerusalem Temple, but dies preventing it.													
Famine in Judea													
Jews banished from Rome by Claudius													
Claudius poisoned by his wife													
Roman General Corbulo invades Armenia, captures Artaxata and Tigranocerta.													
Nero burns Rome, persecutes Christians, and Jewish Revolt of 66 starts Jewish Wars													

8. Moses (fear to fearless)

I want to consider Moses following on from Paul because I think that there are some important similarities. I will characterise Moses by this statement, *Heb 3:5 And Moses verily **was faithful in all his house**, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after*; Moses like Paul kept the faith, *2Ti 4:6 For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. 2Ti 4:7 I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, **I have kept the faith***:

I do not think for a moment that these statements should be taken to mean that these men lived sinless lives. They were mortals and chosen mortals. We could pick at the bones of their lives and find their weak points as people are wont to do and as his brother and sister did. Moses' brother and sister turned on him when he married the Ethiopian woman, *Num 12:1 And Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married: for he had married an Ethiopian woman. Num 12:2 And they said, Hath the LORD indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not spoken also by us? And the LORD heard it. Num 12:3 (Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.)*

Moses did not defend himself but the Lord did, *Num 12:7 My servant Moses is not so, **who is faithful in all mine house**. Num 12:8 With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses? Num 12:9 And the anger of the LORD was kindled against them; and he departed. After that the Lord punished Miriam with leprosy but Moses interceded.*

Moses records the murder that he committed against the Egyptian and the failure to circumcise his son and that shows that when he did wrong he was open about it. He was not one of those sneaky, weak people that would try to sweep it under the carpet. There were stains on the fabric of his life

which would stay with him when others would hide them but that was no reason to drop out from his calling. He was not deterred by his own failures to just “give it all up”. He persevered.

We must make a distinction between the person who appears to uphold the law publicly and live lawless lives in private. Like the child abusers in the so called ‘catholic’ church, the drug addicted ‘crystal’ Methodist leader who nearly destroyed the Cooperative bank and the former President of the United States denying he had ‘relations with that woman’. They live in a world of denial and deceit, the world of the hypocrite which Jesus describes thus, *Mat 23:27 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Mat 23:28 Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.* You may remember the Watergate scandal and brazen deceit of U.S. President Nixon. "There will be no whitewash at the Whitehouse." Whether guilty or not of the original plot, he was certainly involved in the cover up and that is hypocrisy.

There are totally different persons who sin and who are open about their sin, confess their sin and totally repent. These bruised souls show contrition and humility, learning from their errors. The difference is illustrated in the story of the two men praying at the Temple. *Luk 18:10 Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. Luk 18:11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. Luk 18:12 I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. Luk 18:13 And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. Luk 18:14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.* There is nothing hypocritical about the sinful man who upholds the word of God with an open repentant heart. Paul and Moses were such men.

We have a mistaken view that Moses was some hard unyielding character. That his strength was somehow his own intransigence rather than faith in his God. Some people are stubborn as mules because it is in their nature but Moses was not stubborn, he was humble, faithful and obedient. He was a quiet man not given to public speaking, perhaps because of a slight stammer. Moses did not start his career as a natural leader or force to be reckoned with.

Why does Moses have a reputation for hardness? I think that it is because the people who do not like Moses are people who do not like being challenged. When we are up against the sinful heart, we shall find, *1Co 2:14 But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.* These ‘natural’ people will be annoyed if you confront their behaviour and beliefs. They will call you legalistic, unloving, hard, judgemental and unfeeling. Of course they will, because they do not like being confronted by the word of God. It pricks them and deflates their self-righteousness. I say back to those people that you are lawless. You do not like being challenged by Moses.

Paul, like Moses suffers the same criticism because he holds the line on truth. Truth cannot be changed to suit the sinner or the sins of the age. *Joh 10:35 If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and **the scripture cannot be broken;**Joh 10:35 The Scriptures cannot be discredited.* GW. Moses and Paul were not prepared to let God’s word become discredited,

manipulated, misrepresented or changed and it is this which has given them the reputation for hardness.

In order to counter the apparent hardness of Paul and Moses, Jesus has been set forward as an alternative approach to God, loving, kind, gentle, forgiving, non-judgemental. This is a half-truth and an attempt to discredit Paul and Moses. If you look at the sayings of Jesus, the '**Hard Sayings of Jesus**' you will find that Jesus is far more critical and hard on people who oppose the word of God. Jesus' tightens up on marriage, *Mat 19:7 They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? Mat 19:8 He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. Mat 19:9 And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.*

Far from giving the liberals an easy ride, Jesus cuts the ground from under them. Jesus is 'an hard Man'. Even the slothful servant realised this, *Mat 25:24 Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: Jesus never gives way when people undermine the veracity of Scripture, like the Sadducees who do not believe in Resurrection, Mar 12:24 And Jesus answering said unto them, **Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the scriptures, neither the power of God?***

When it comes to Bible truth, Jesus, Moses and Paul are unyielding, unswerving in upholding it. They are at odds with the modernists who continue to poison the wells of truth, reinterpret it, rewrite it to suit an evil and adulterous generation. People who have no Divine calling, who set themselves up as the arbiters of Divine Truth will perish. They will perish utterly because they do not do the things that Christ asks, because they have rewritten the script to suit themselves.

What is the character of a person who is prepared to stand against the tide? I believe that they have already accepted that as far as this world is concerned, they are dead and it does not matter what happens to them. They are totally and utterly committed to the cause of Christ. *Heb 11:24 By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Heb 11:25 Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Heb 11:26 Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward. Heb 11:27 By faith he forsook Egypt, **not fearing the wrath of the king:** for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.*

Moses could have had an easy life, a life of luxury and indulgence by the standards of the day if he had adopted the 'do nothing' attitude. Had he chosen this path of ease and least resistance, we might then have read in our history books about a Pharaoh called Moses who presided over the demise of the Hebrew nation but we do not. Moses refused to be called a son of Pharaoh's daughter. Moses refused to take the easy life enjoying the pleasures of Egypt. He refused the adoption papers, rather he chose affliction with God's people. He was fearless of the King of Egypt's anger against him because he knew Christ. He valued the reproaches that came because of his faith, the 'reproach of Christ', outweighed all the treasure in Egypt and that was certainly a huge amount of treasure.

Like Paul, Moses needed his 'Damascus road' and it came in the form of a 'burning bush'. On the run from the Egyptians, he settles in the land of Midian, works as a shepherd, gets married and settles down to start a family. Some forty years pass and when Moses is 80 years old, at a time when most people are ready to depart this life, Moses starts his famous ministry, with his 83 year old brother Aaron. Two old boys will set out for the adventure of a lifetime.

Does the Lord favour old men over young men? Abraham, Jacob, Joshua were also getting on in years when they began their main works. You may recall that when George Muller hit 70 years, he launched on an itinerant ministry for the next 20 years. It is an encouragement that age is no barrier to service and that these latter years of maturity should be put to good use and not squandered on self-service. It is a shame that there are so very few older mature Christians in the churches to set an example of wisdom and knowledge. Instead you will find them squandering their final years of their lives on a sun bed, in self indulgent activities totally unrelated to the promulgation of the Kingdom of God. Old Christians in our generation are generally lazy and impotent leaving the work to the young. Moses to the contrary is just getting started.

As things get worse for the Israelites, God 'remembers' His covenant and sets about delivering His people and begins what became known as the 'Exodus'. As Moses leads his flock around 'the backside of the desert' he is about to exchange one flock for another. Jehovah appears to him on mount Horeb. Moses will return to this mountain, also called Sinai, to get the tables of the Law, but here is the formal introduction.

Exo 3:1 Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father in law, the priest of Midian: and he led the flock to the backside of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb. Exo 3:2 And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed. Exo 3:3 And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt.

Humanly speaking I might have chosen something a little more impressive than a burning bush. Perhaps a huge angel with a sparking sword, towering over the mountain, lightning and thunder announcing my introduction? Something epic. The sky filled with heaven's warriors, the sound of a roaring army of God. Something worthy of a blockbuster movie. To see such a fearful thing would be very encouraging and convincing. You would hardly fear accomplishing any task with that show of power behind you.

But the Creator uses a little burning bush and as is often the case, the Lord is very understated when He shows His power. I say this respectfully, that it is almost always understated. The birth of Jesus was very modest. There was no big announcement, no welcoming committees of the great and the good, the kings of the earth and their ministers, Emperors and Empresses. It was not going to be a grand show to satisfy unbelieving dignitaries. The sort of thing that you see in sci-fi movies, where Earth welcomes the Alien race. It is not about shows of power because the real effect of God is in the heart of man.

It is never about 'overkill', for example, when Moses goes up against the Egyptian magicians: *Exo 7:10 And Moses and Aaron went in unto Pharaoh, and they did so as the LORD had commanded: and Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh, and before his servants, and it became a serpent. Exo 7:11 Then Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers: now the magicians of Egypt, they also did*

*in like manner with their enchantments. Exo 7:12 For they cast down every man his rod, and they became serpents: but Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods. Exo 7:13 And **he hardened Pharaoh's heart, that he hearkened not unto them;** as the LORD had said.*

Moses' rod did not swallow up everything, the furniture, the magicians, the river of Egypt and so on. It was just enough to make the point and just enough to lay a doubt in Pharaoh's mind. Pharaoh may have been left with sufficient doubts about the power of Moses such that he felt that he still could persist in his persecution of Israel. The signs were not there to convert Pharaoh, they were there to harden his resolve.

The burning bush may have the same purpose. Convincing but not overwhelmingly convincing. Perhaps the burning bush was chosen as it was a symbol of judgement to come, *Isa 5:5 And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down: Isa 5:6 And I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned, nor digged; but there shall come up briars and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.*

To this 80 year old man, the challenge was about to be revealed and it was almost overwhelming. Moses may have had an inkling of his destiny, *Act 7:23 And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel. Act 7:24 And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian: Act 7:25 **For he supposed his brethren would have understood** how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not.* Forty years later, it is possible that Moses began to doubt that anything was going to happen. As ever, our timing is not God's good time. *Gen 15:13 And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; Exo 12:41 And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the selfsame day it came to pass, that all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt.*

So what is the transformation that occurs in the life of Moses at this point in time? He becomes a man of God. Up to that point in his life, he was fearful of confrontation. He fled confrontation. *Exo 4:13 But Moses said, "Please, Lord, send someone else." Exo 4:14 Then the LORD became angry with Moses and asked, "What about your brother Aaron the Levite? I know he can speak well. He's already on his way to meet you, and he will be very glad to see you. Exo 4:15 You will speak to him and tell him what to say. I will help both of you speak, and I will teach you both what to do. GW.*

Fear is a disability. It disables Christians from functioning normally. *Pro 29:25 The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe. Pro 29:25 Don't fall into the trap of being a coward-- trust the LORD, and you will be safe. CEV.* How did Moses overcome his disability? What had happened to Moses? He had come to where he trusted his God completely. The fear of men had been replaced by the fear of God. *Pro 14:26 In the fear of the LORD is strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge.* As a brother has observed, "do not tell your God how big your problem is, tell your problem how big your God is". From now on, Moses will stand in the face of all opposition to the truth of God.

But why should this attitude, this transformation be peculiar to Moses? Why should it be the characteristic of a few people? *Pro 28:1 The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous*

are bold as a lion. Where does this boldness come from? It comes from our knowledge of our God. I am not saying that it necessarily happens overnight but it should happen. As we grow in faith so we should be transformed and grow in confidence. The disciples of Jesus were fearful because they were 'little faiths'. *Mar 4:39 And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. Mar 4:40 And he said unto them, **Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?** Mar 4:41 And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?*

Will Jesus come and find 'the faith' when He returns? *Luk 18:7 And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? Luk 18:8 I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless **when the Son of man cometh, shall he find (the) faith on the earth?*** Perhaps not, unless we show more concern for our spiritual wellbeing. Faith will grow as we immerse ourselves in the Word of God. *Rom 10:17 So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. Rom 10:17 so then the faith is by a report, and the report through a saying of God, YLT.*

People today thrash around in a sea of ignorance because they do not give time to God's word. I do not mean just reading it, taking a few texts each day or some substitute devotional. I mean sitting down and giving it serious thought as to how we might apply it in our own lives. Did you learn anything of God worth sharing this week? If not, you have had a wasted week, whatever you did.

That 'burning bush' is as real to me as if I were there with Moses because the Bible tells me about it. I have been on the sea of Galilee with Jesus, I have stood with the Centurion at the foot of the Cross. I have travelled with Paul, I have seen the Creation of the heavens and earth and met Adam. I have sailed through the flood with Noah and I have seen the Kingdom of Heaven. They are real and part of my 'childlike' life.

I do not need Moses experience to take on the understanding of his experience. I have the same God and the same promises, *Luk 12:11 And when they bring you unto the synagogues, and unto magistrates, and powers, take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say: Luk 12:12 For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say.* If we are prepared to die for our faith, we might just be ready to live for it. *Mar 8:35 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it. Mar 8:36 For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?*

Did you know that more Christians were martyred in the 20th century than in all previous centuries combined, according to David B. Barrett and Todd M. Johnson, two of the world's leading religious demographers. The trend has not abated in this century. Though the statistics are uncertain and highly dependent on counting methodologies, the number of Christians killed for their faith every year almost certainly lies in the thousands and possibly tens of thousands. According to the International Society for Human Rights, Christians are estimated to make up 80 percent of those who are persecuted for their religion. They have been killed in India, Vietnam, Iraq, Colombia, Pakistan, Nigeria, Mexico, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, North Korea, Sri Lanka, China and Indonesia. We are involved in a global conflict. If we are to survive we must be fearless.

Moses was human and subject to frailty. He broke the tables of the law, he smote the rock and lost the right to enter Canaan with God's people but his failure did not deter him from his primary task. It

was to deliver the people of God from Egypt to the promised land. Our duty is no different to that of Moses. It is to deliver God's people from darkness and the power of the devil or die trying. If we Christians improve ourselves, we should also be concerned to improve our brothers and sisters lives.

It requires strong, committed and fearless people, people like Moses who has met with God. It requires a transformation of our attitude.

9. Rachel (loving the Saints)

We start our story with Jacob's search for a wife, *Gen 28:5 And Isaac sent away Jacob: and he went to Padanaram unto Laban, son of Bethuel the Syrian, the brother of Rebekah, Jacob's and Esau's mother.* As we have shown in a previous study (Jesus and Prophecy p.50) Jacob was an old man. I think that it is an important aspect of the story. We should disabuse ourselves that this was a passionate romance between two star struck young lovers. Let me remind you how we compute Jacob's age. We work backwards from Joseph in Egypt.

- *Gen 47:9 And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred **and thirty years**: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage.*
- *Gen 41:46 And Joseph was **thirty years old** when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went throughout all the land of Egypt. Gen 41:47 And in the seven plenteous years the earth brought forth by handfuls.*
- *Gen 45:11 And there will I nourish thee; for yet there are **five years** of famine; lest thou, and thy household, and all that thou hast, come to poverty.* They are 2 years into the lean years and Joseph was about 39 years old at this point (30 + 7 + 2 years = 39 years).
- *Gen 31:41 Thus have I been **twenty years** in thy house; I served thee **fourteen years** for thy two daughters, and six years for thy cattle: and thou hast changed my wages ten times.*

Working backwards from his entry into Egypt to when he leaves his family home, we count back from 130 years minus at least 53 years. This places Jacob in his seventies. So what you ask is the point of computing Jacob's age? It is that he was not exactly a poster boy for a magazine, he was not a fine young man. He is almost a confirmed old bachelor. He was probably getting to the 'grumpy old man' stage of life, as he observed a bit later, *Gen 47:9 And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage.*

Jacob finally left home after arguing with his equally old twin brother over the birthright but it was quite late in life to seek love and a family. It is at this stage in life that he embarks on marriage, not with the dubious local women but with those of his own tribe. The tricker, Jacob, was about to meet his match in more ways than one and his prospective father in law, Laban, was about to put one over upon Jacob.

Laban has two daughters, Rachel and Leah. It is not clear that they share the same mother. According to Jewish tradition Rachel is just into her teens when Jacob arrives and he is overjoyed to see her. *Gen 29:11 And Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice, and wept. Gen 29:11 He then kissed Rachel and started crying because he was so happy.* CEV. I bet he was happy. An old man and

what we might call today a 'trophy bride' and on top of that a poor old man with nothing to give but servitude. You certainly could not ask Rachel "What first attracted you to the millionaire Jacob ben Isaac?" It was on the face of it a poor deal for Rachel.

What man, especially of that age, would be prepared to work and wait for 7 years for his bride and then do another 7 when the terms were changed? There can be no doubt about Jacob's devotion but there is no comment from Rachel as to whether she loved Jacob. She does not appear to have any say in the matter and the marriage was arranged for her. Rachel and Leah were no different to cattle, *Gen 29:15 And Laban said unto Jacob, Because thou art my brother, shouldest thou therefore serve me for nought? tell me, what shall thy wages be? Gen 29:16 And Laban had two daughters: the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Gen 29:17 Leah was tender eyed; but Rachel was beautiful and well favoured. Gen 29:18 And Jacob loved Rachel; and said, I will serve thee seven years for Rachel thy younger daughter.*

People were viewed as property, that is, money. The social order gave the head of the house authority over his wife and children and servants, *Exo 21:20 And if a man strikes his male slave or his slave-girl with a rod, and he dies under his hand, avenging he shall be avenged. Exo 21:21 But if he continues a day or two, he shall not be avenged, **for he is his silver.** YLT. Exo 21:7 And **if a man sell his daughter to be a maidservant**, she shall not go out as the menservants do.*

Arranged marriages were normal and parents or retainers would make the decisions for their offspring. *Gen 28:6 When Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob, and sent him away to Padanaram, to take him a wife from thence; and that as he blessed him he gave him a charge, saying, Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan; Gen 28:7 And that **Jacob obeyed his father and his mother**, and was gone to Padanaram;* In those days, even 70 year old children did what they were told.

I speculate that Rachel was not overjoyed with the prospect of an aged husband but she was a dutiful daughter. Perhaps the most that this girl would get out of marriage was an escape from her greedy father. However, I even question whether marriage was the best escape option. The girl has 7 years to wait for her wedding day and after the wedding feast is swapped with her older sister. I imagine Leah was going to be hard to 'move on' so Laban would make the swap on the wedding night. If Rachel was in love with Jacob and really wanted to marry him, why did she not pop up in the marriage bed? Why the swap?

We are reminded of Jacob's deceit in disguising himself as Esau to get his birthright. *Gen 27:21 And Isaac said unto Jacob, Come near, I pray thee, that I may feel thee, my son, whether thou be my very son Esau or not. Gen 27:22 And Jacob went near unto Isaac his father; and he felt him, and said, The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau. Gen 27:23 And he discerned him not, because his hands were hairy, as his brother Esau's hands: so he blessed him.* It would not have been difficult to disguise Leah, especially in a darkened bed chamber and providing she did not say anything it might be easy to pass her off.

But to do this, I suggest, Rachel must have been in on the deceit. It was her wedding day and unless she was imprisoned against her will (and there is no sign of this), she was complicit. What bride would not protest if some other woman stole the groom on the wedding night? Indeed, I think that

there was a conspiracy between Laban, Rachel and Leah to deceive Jacob. Deceit was a family trait and not a very admirable one.

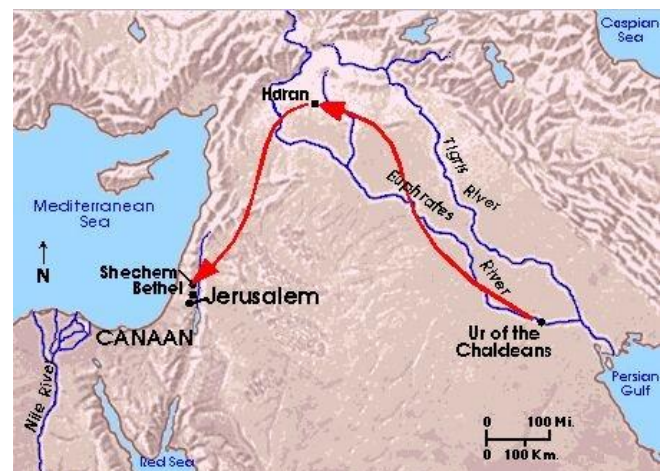
Jacob is given Rachel a week later but he has to serve another 7 years which he does without complaint. *Gen 29:27 Fulfil her week, and we will give thee this also for the service which thou shalt serve with me yet seven other years. Gen 29:28 And Jacob did so, and fulfilled her week: and he gave him Rachel his daughter to wife also* and that is where things start to fall apart because Jacob does not love Leah, in fact he hates her. As we saw in the study on 'The hard sayings of Jesus', hatred is not necessarily vindictive or spiteful, rather it is neglectful. I do not think that Jacob was unkind to Leah, he still had sexual relations with her but did not show her that attentiveness that accompanies love. He probably pays far more attention to Rachel and that was not a recipe for peace.

Rachel now becomes the victim of Jacob's attitude to Leah and her womb is shut up and she is barren. There is further tension in the relationship, *Gen 30:1 And when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister; and said unto Jacob, Give me children, or else I die. Gen 30:2 And Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel: and he said, Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?* Jacob is irritated and shows little sympathy for his complaining wife.

Eventually Rachel's prayers are answered. *Gen 30:22 And God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened to her, and opened her womb. Gen 30:23 And she conceived, and bare a son; and said, God hath taken away my reproach: Gen 30:24 And she called his name Joseph; and said, The LORD shall add to me another son.* 'Joseph' (added) is a prophetic name that anticipated the birth of her next son Benoni (son of my sorrows) or as he became known Benjamin. Joseph became the favourite son (coat of many colours) and the recipient of the double portion for his children (Manasseh and Ephraim).

Eventually, after 20 years, Jacob and his family leave Laban but not without incident. Rachel takes Laban's idols with her. *Gen 31:19 And Laban went to shear his sheep: and Rachel had stolen the images (תְּרָפִים = teraphim) that were her father's. Gen 31:20 And Jacob stole away unawares to Laban the Syrian, in that he told him not that he fled.* What is this about? Where did these 'gods' come from?

Laban was a Chaldean but the family came from Ur about 200 miles south of Babylon and settled in Syria. He was thus a Syrian or Aramaian, *Gen 25:20 And Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah to wife, the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian of Padanaram, the sister to Laban the Syrian.* Jacob was also a Syrian. The descendents of Terah migrated from a region near modern day Basrah, the marshlands bordering the Persian Gulf. *Gen 11:31 And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's*



wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there. Gen 11:32 And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years: and Terah died in Haran.

My suggestion is that Laban's 'gods' were brought with Terah out of Ur and passed down to Laban. I think that one of the reasons that Abraham was taken out of Haran in Syria, was to be quarantined with Jehovah. It is a fact of life that an unequal yoke is more likely to bring a person down than elevate them and the corrupt influences of paganism will do their satanic work.

Gen 12:4 So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran. This is where Laban lived, Gen 27:43 Now therefore, my son, obey my voice; and arise, flee thou to Laban my brother to Haran;

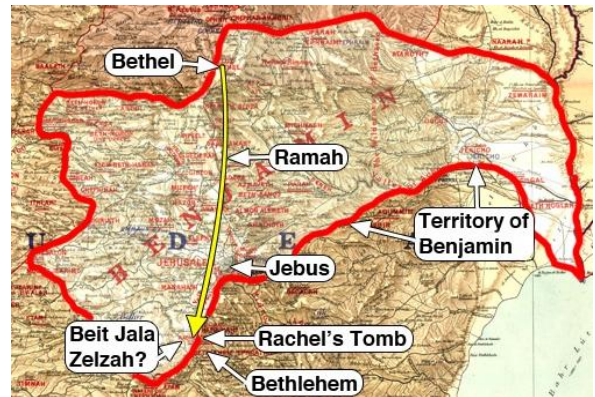
We now ask the question as to why Rachel took the 'gods' of Laban her father? It might have been some form of revenge, payback for her treatment? It might have been to use them? Eventually they are put away. *Gen 35:2 Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments: Gen 35:3 And let us arise, and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went. Gen 35:4 And they gave unto Jacob all the strange gods which were in their hand, and all their earrings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem.* Sadly as with all of our idols, we seldom destroy them, we merely put them out of sight when it suits us but they are always ready to reclaim.

It is to be hoped that by now Rachel had entered in to the covenant with Jehovah. Just what her knowledge consisted of must have been very basic compared with Israelites under Moses and those under the New Covenant. Law and revelation were not yet codified and it is unwise of us to judge Rachel by the standards of our revelation. Rachel is though a mother in Israel and I will suggest that she was a good mother for at least two reasons. Firstly, because she brought Joseph up as a godly young man and he was also favoured by Jehovah, which became abundantly clear in Egypt. His ability as a good steward was perhaps generated in his youth by Rachel.

Secondly, you will often be more likely to see the mother's influence rather than the father's in a son. Genetically, men may be more like their father but more influenced by our mother. If today is anything to go by, 88% of mothers treat their son's differently to daughters. They may spend more time with them also, especially in the early years, so they will have a strong maternal influence. Since Rachel had only one child for quite a while, she could devote a lot of time to him, compared with Jacob's other wives and their many children. Jacob also would not have been able to spend as much time with each child although Joseph was his favourite. My view is that we see a lot of Rachel in Joseph and it is all good.

I do not doubt that Rachel dearly loved her natural children but it is a great sadness that she could not enjoy them fully. Sadly she dies in childbirth, *Gen 35:16 Then they moved on from Bethel. When they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel went into labor and was having severe labor pains. Gen 35:17 During one of her pains, the midwife said to her, "Don't be afraid! You're having another son!" Gen 35:18 Rachel was dying. As she took her last breath, she named her son Benoni [Son of My Sorrow], but his father named him Benjamin [Son of My Right Hand]. Gen 35:19 Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem). GW.*

A short and sorrowful life comes to a close but a soul not to be forgotten. Her sorrow is I think because she wanted children and they did not come quickly enough, not the sorrow of having a child. And this is where we see her defining characteristic and perhaps the transformation in her life. She is in a manner of speaking raised from the dead and addresses the nation at a turbulent time in their history. *Jer 31:15 Thus saith the LORD; A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rahel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not.* What children we ask? Her own? No, not literally because they have all died centuries before.



Ramah is where another barren mother lived, *1Sa 1:19 And they rose up in the morning early, and worshipped before the LORD, and returned, and came to their house to Ramah: and Elkanah knew Hannah his wife; and the LORD remembered her.* Ramah was also the staging point for the captives being taken to Babylon. *Jer 40:1 The Word which was to Jeremiah from Jehovah, after Nebuzaradan, the chief of the executioners, had sent him from Ramah, when he had taken him (and he was bound in chains, among all the captives of Jerusalem and Judah being exiled to Babylon).* LITV.

It is at this place that Rachel is chosen as the chief mourner for the remnant of Israel. You recall that it was about one hundred years before Judah's captivity, the northern kingdoms had been taken into the Assyrian captivity. What remained were a few tribes and now they too would be carried away. The tribes that remained of Israel are mentioned in Chronicles at the time of the restoration of the Temple of Solomon under Josiah. *2Ch 34:9 And they came to Hilkiyah the high priest, and they gave the silver brought into the house of God, that the Levites who guarded the threshold had gathered from the hand of Manasseh and Ephraim, and from all the remnant of Israel, and from all Judah and Benjamin, and the ones living in Jerusalem.*

The main tribes are Judah, Benjamin, Manasseh and Ephraim. Manasseh and Ephraim were the sons of Joseph, Rachel's grandchildren and Benjamin her son. This might explain why Rachel is the chief mourner at the departure to Babylon. However, we cannot take just one verse out of a prophecy and set it on its own. It must be seen and understood in the general context of what is being said. If we do not do this we are like those people who create doctrines by sticking unrelated texts together. In the context of Jeremiah, Rachel weeps but is comforted.

Jer 31:15 So says Jehovah, A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing, bitter weeping: Rachel weeping for her sons; she refuses to be comforted for her sons for they are not. Jer 31:16 So says Jehovah, Hold back your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears. For there will be a reward for your work, says Jehovah, and they shall come again from the land of the enemy. Jer 31:17 And there is hope for your end, says Jehovah, that your sons will come again to their own territory. LITV. Far from being a cry of hopelessness, it is a cry of Hope. Rachel will be comforted and things will be restored.

Look again into Jeremiah and the even wider context. Jer 31:3 Jehovah has appeared to me from far away, saying, Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love! On account of this, with loving kindness I have drawn you. Jer 31:4 Again I will build you, and you shall be built again, O virgin of Israel. You will again put on your tambourines and go forth in the dance of those making merry..... Jer 31:23

So says Jehovah of Hosts, the God of Israel: Again they will speak this Word in the land of Judah, and in its cities, when I turn again their captivity, saying, Jehovah bless you, O home of righteousness, O holy mountain!..... Jer 31:31 Behold, the days come, says Jehovah, that I will cut a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, Jer 31:32 not according to the covenant that I cut with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt (which covenant of Mine they broke, although I was a husband to them, says Jehovah). Jer 31:33 But this shall be the covenant that I will cut with the house of Israel: After those days, declares Jehovah, I will put My Law in their inward parts, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

Rachel's cry is a prelude to comfort and a prelude to the New Covenant. Because of this, the prophecy is extremely relevant to the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem of Judea. The prophecy of Jeremiah is coming to fulfilment in the life of the Christ child. The Spirit of prophecy can be seen in the Testimony of Jesus. *Rev 19:10 And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.*

A cursory reading of Matthew's Gospel might suggest that Rachel is crying for the massacre of the so called innocents. *Mat 2:16 Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men. Mat 2:17 Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, Mat 2:18 In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.* Ramah you will note is geographically north of Jerusalem in Benjamin, whereas Rachel was not buried here but near to Bethlehem, south of Jerusalem in Judea.

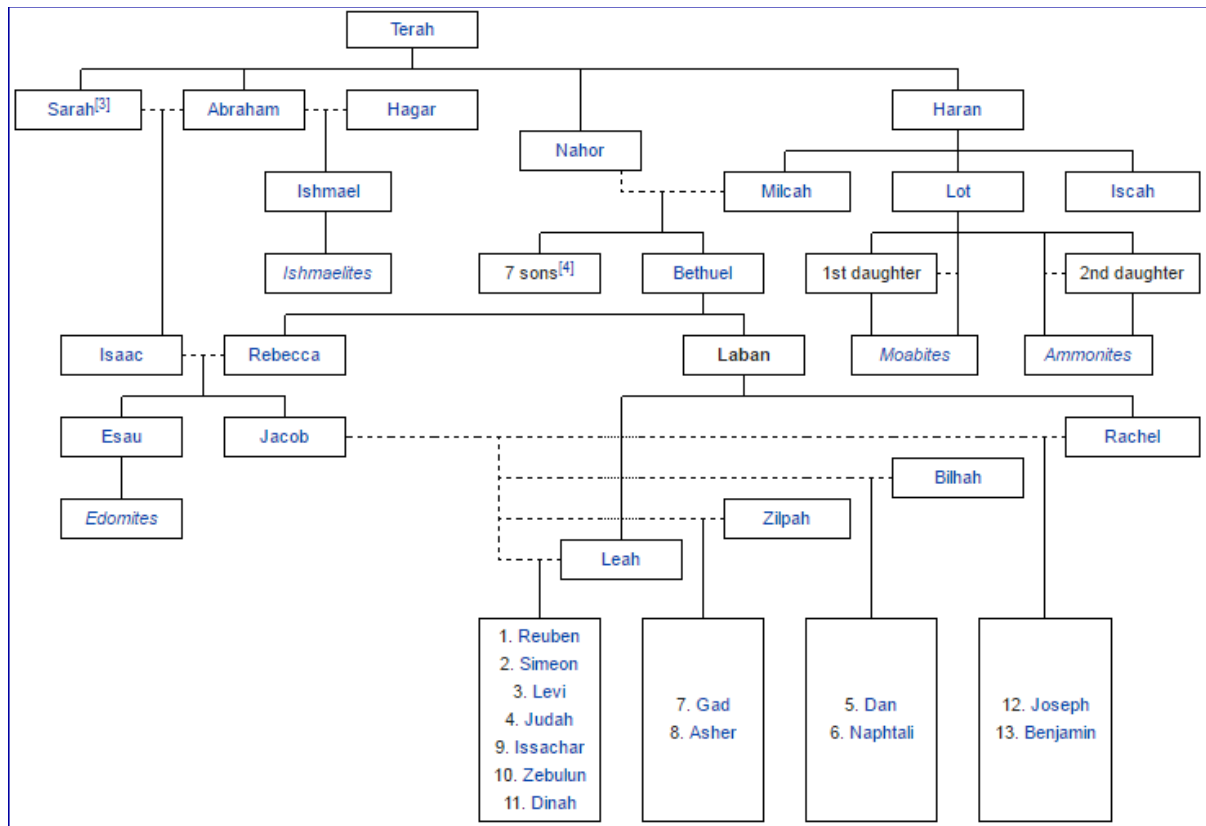
However suggestive the verse is about the children of Bethlehem, they are not Rachel's children. It would be far more appropriate that if that were the focus of the prophecy, it would be Leah weeping for her children. The children of Bethlehem were descendents of Judah and Judah was Leah's son. We also cannot isolate those verses from the wider context of Jeremiah chapter 31, which speaks of the New Covenant and the return of the captivity. Rachel is comforted in Christ. That is the only place that anyone or any mother can have.

What does it suggest about Rachel and a transformation that has occurred? I do not think that it is stretching a point to say that Rachel had that great Christian quality that loves the children of God. *1Jn 5:2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments.* Apart from close circles of Christian friends, I rarely see the wider concern for the people of God. I have never seen anyone in my generation who has any real concern for Christians in future generations.

In time past men would plant a forest not that they would benefit from it but that their descendents would. Men would lay down a vintage that they would never drink for a future generation. Some would create a legacy for the future poor. We must ask ourselves whether it will be to our glory if we are more concerned with the legacy to our unbelieving children rather than the people of God.

Rachel has that blessed quality that she weeps for the people of God and for that she is comforted. It is an example that we should also embrace.

The family of Terah.



10. Peter (disciple in the making).

Before we examine the trials and tribulations of the Apostle Peter, I want to try and understand where he is in his life and In order to see the Transformation(s) in Peter's life we need a baseline from which he is transforming. There are lots of presumptions about Peter, such as, that he was only converted when Jesus called him by the sea, implying that he was some sort of heathen before he met Jesus. I suggest that this is quite wrong.

Peter was a fisherman and a resident of Capernaum although he was originally from Bethsaida but he moved to Capernaum. *Joh 1:44 Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.Mar 1:21 And they went into Capernaum; and straightway on the sabbath day he entered into the synagogue, and taught. Mar 1:29 And forthwith, when they were come out of the synagogue, they entered into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.* Why did he move? Here is a delightful explanation⁸ :

Jesus' disciples Peter and Andrew were careful about money. They uprooted their families and moved to a new city because it gave them a tax break. The distance between the two cities is only five miles, but they belonged to different jurisdictions: Bethsaida, on the east side of the Jordan River, was in the territory of Herod Philip, while Capernaum on the west side belonged to that of Herod Antipas.

⁸ <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/places/related-articles/peters-house> by Jerome Murphy-O'Connor

Peter and Andrew needed their fish processed (air dried or salted) for sale outside the immediate area, and the principal (if not the only) fish factory on the Sea of Galilee was at Magdala, a town in the same territory as Capernaum. Fishermen from Bethsaida had to bring their catch across a border and pay a tax—hence the customs house at Capernaum (Mark 2:14). By becoming residents of Capernaum, Peter and Andrew avoided this tax. Such hard-headedness is a significant guarantee of the historicity of the gospel tradition. They were not religious romantics prepared to believe anything that took their fancy.

Peter's brother Andrew was a disciple of John the Baptist when he meets Jesus, *Joh 1:40 One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. Andrew then brings Peter to Jesus. Joh 1:41 He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. Joh 1:42 And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, a stone.*

Later on by the sea of Galilee Peter is called to follow Jesus. *Mat 4:18 And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. Mat 4:19 And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. Mat 4:20 And they straightway left their nets, and followed him.*

We can only imagine what must have been going through their minds when this happened? Perhaps they had already had many conversations about this 'Jesus' and formed an opinion about him so it was not a great surprise when He called them. It was certainly an irresistible and effectual calling but did it equate to conversion and was there any repentance involved in this calling? It is not recorded and so was not important to the narrative at this point.

What is Peter's background? He is married but we do not know if Peter had any children *Mat 8:14 And when Jesus was come into Peter's house, he saw his wife's mother laid, and sick of a fever.* He is a Jew. *Gal 2:14 But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?*

As a practicing Jew, Peter is a partaker of the First Covenant, living under the law and customs of Moses. What did Jesus expect of this man? Was he 'good to go' or did he need training and change? This requires some explanation if we are to understand Peter's journey. Was Peter a believer or an unbeliever? This will require some explanation because it is a very broad concept. We have to ask 'a believer in what?' There are people who have a general concept, a general belief about the existence of God, but even devils have that belief. Then there is a more specific belief that we associate with saving faith and believing in Jesus as our personal Saviour.

Since Jesus had not yet died Peter could not have yet arrived at salvation in Jesus. So to speak of 'believing' in Jesus as we do is not yet applicable. If we ask 'did Peter believe in Jehovah and the promises of the Covenant?' I would say that most certainly he did and I would go so far as to suggest that he was a faithful Jew. He is to my mind the Israelite that Paul had in mind as being part of the faithful remnant.

*Rom 11:1 I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. Rom 11:2 God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew. Wot ye not what the scripture saith of Elias? how he maketh intercession to God against Israel, saying, Rom 11:3 Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life. Rom 11:4 But what saith the answer of God unto him? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal. Rom 11:5 **Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace.***

How does Peter fit into his times and his religion? What was the state and expectation of the Jew in Israel? There was clearly a Messianic expectation and this is attested to at Jesus Birth. Jesus ministry is laid out in prophecy, *Mat 1:21 And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. Mar 2:17 When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: **I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.***

Who does this refer to? The nation of Israel or both Jews at that time and later the Gentiles, or is it just to the unbelieving Jews and later on the gentiles? Did every Jew in Jesus day need to repent? This is an important point because it raises the question as to whether certain people, faithful Jews, also needed to repent. People like Mary, Joseph, Elizabeth, Anna the Prophetess who served God day and night, and Simeon of whom it is said, *Luk 2:25 And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him.* These were just some of the 'good' Jewish people, not the self-righteous Pharisees and Scribes, or the secular apostate Jews. Would these 'good Jews' need to repent and be baptised?

Peter's story is set in a period of transition from the Older to the New Covenant. The debilitated and weakened nation of Israel is riddled with religious extremism and its days are numbered. As we have seen, there is a faithful Jewish remnant that understands the prophecies of the Older Testament and anticipates their fulfilment. The Messiah was expected but some thought that this would herald the national revival of the earthly nation. *Luk 24:21 But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, to day is the third day since these things were done.* The message unfolds to reveal the Heavenly Kingdom not an earthly Kingdom.

The reality is that the earthly Kingdom of Israel is finished. *Joh 18:36 Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.* Jesus' Kingdom is the Kingdom of Heaven. He leads the people of God onward and upward. It is a new Exodus. *Luk 9:30 And, behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah. Luk 9:31 Appearing in glory, they spoke of His exodus, which He was about to accomplish in Jerusalem.* LITV.

This transfiguration on the Mount is a significant meeting. Moses and Elijah, the representatives of the Law and the Prophets discuss the New Exodus. Moses had already participated in an Exodus and now Jesus would do the same. He would lead his people out of bondage. The Law and the Prophets had already told of this and their representatives, Moses and Elijah, appear in order to confirm the fact. Paul explains the same thing in the allegory of the covenants. *Gal 4:24 Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. Gal 4:25 For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem*

which now is, and is in bondage with her children. Gal 4:26 But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. This is further reinforced by the predicted destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, Mat 24:1 And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple. Mat 24:2 And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.

We Christians have left the earthly Jerusalem behind and come to the New Jerusalem, we have come to mount Zion, the same is the city of David, *Heb 12:22 But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels. We are consequently seated together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus, Eph 2:6 And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:* It is beyond me how people can focus on God's kingdom on this earth when these verses deny it.

Christ is then, delivering us from the bondage of the law, that old legal system of the first Covenant, *Rom 8:2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.....Rom 7:6 But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter. Rom 7:7 What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.*

The transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant, the Old Kingdom to the New Kingdom begins with the ministry of John the Baptist. *Mat 3:1 In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, Mat 3:2 And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.* Just what were they to repent (μετανοέω = metanoēō) or change their minds about? Many knew that they were sinners and unclean in the eyes of God so what was to change there? Peter knew he was a sinner, *Luk 5:8 And seeing, Simon Peter fell at the knees of Jesus, saying, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, Lord. Luk 5:9 For astonishment took hold of him, and all those with him, at the haul of fish which they took;* If Peter was a sinner after the "baptism for repentance", what had the repentance been for? If his sins were remitted or pardoned he still sinned, so sin was not removed from his life. To understand this we look at John the Baptist's ministry.

John's ministry was preparatory to Jesus' ministry and carried a message of repentance, *Luk 1:16 And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God.* This verse suggests that many in Israel were apostate and required repentance and forgiveness, *Luk 3:2 Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. Luk 3:3 And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins;* This was the same message that Jesus preached, *Luk 24:47 And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.*

We should be careful how we read this. It says for the 'remission of sins' **not the 'removal of sins'**. Sinfulness is part of our nature and as far as I can see from scripture, is never removed. If anyone says that sin is removed, they are a deceived, *1Jn 1:8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.* 'Remission' is not just a 'once off', it is ongoing, *1Jn 1:7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.* Sin may be dealt with forensically in the single sacrifice of Christ but the blood is constantly applied in the sanctification of the sinner. 'Repentance for

remission' marks a change in the life of the sinner that puts him on the path of sanctification. While I agree that Christ died for our sins, our life must show the application of that death. It is ongoing as we change, as we are transformed from Glory to Glory.

The question is did John the Baptist intend his message apply to the faithful in Israel or to the apostate in Israel? Did Mary the mother of Jesus have to repent and be baptised? Surely, we would argue, the Law was firmly in place until the death of Jesus and this is changing the terms and conditions before its expiry? John's ministry is on the face of it undermining the law. How could water remove sin because *Heb 9:22 And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission*. The blood sacrifices of the First Covenant were in place until the Crucifixion.

The sacrifices were still kept and the sacrifices continued to be made according to that law, *Luk 22:13 And they went, and found as he had said unto them: and they made ready the passover*. We might conclude then that if in that transitional period it was necessary to "repent for the remission of sins", then either the law had ceased to be in operation, which is clearly not the situation or that the law was firmly in place and so "repent for the remission of sins" marks the occasion of something else.

This being the case, then the "repentance and remission" are anticipatory of the New Kingdom while the Old Kingdom stands. It is the process of transition between the two Kingdoms. John starts the process as the representative of the Old Covenant and Jesus takes over as the head of the New Covenant. The symbolism is of going through the water and leaving the old life behind which is very similar to the Exodus from Egypt where they turned away from Egypt to Canaan and went through the waters. It is the gathering together of the faithful, reaffirming their lost state and the need for salvation. It is the gathering of God's people to leave the Old Kingdom. Those who wanted to stay would be lost.

The Gospel or 'good news' that Peter and the disciples would carry throughout the world has at its heart the Kingdom of God. This is also called the kingdom of Heaven. *Mat 3:1 In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, Mat 3:2 And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Mar 1:14 Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, Mar 1:15 And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.*

There are people who try to make a distinction between these 'kingdoms' saying that they are different. They are not. It is possible that Matthew uses the term 'the Kingdom of Heaven' because he is writing to the Jews, for whom the 'Kingdom of God' would have an earthly connotation being identified with the nation of Israel. He thus directs the Jews to Heaven. This is what the Gospel is all about.

I suggest that the Good News, the Gospel, is not simply about Jesus saving people from sin, although that is embraced by the concept. The Gospel transforms, transports and eventually translates us into the Kingdom of God. When Paul preaches the Gospel he declares. *1Co 15:1 Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; 1Co 15:2 By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye*

have believed in vain. 1Co 15:3 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;

This is the preparatory part of the Gospel. It is the 'repentance for the remission of sins'. Reading on through 1st Corinthians chapter 15, Paul takes us through the mystery of the resurrection of the dead and explains to us, *1Co 15:46 Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. 1Co 15:47 The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. 1Co 15:48 As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. 1Co 15:49 And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. 1Co 15:50 Now this I say, brethren, **that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.***

We again affirm that the Gospel of the Kingdom of God and our inheritance in it is the terminus of the Gospel. The Kingdom of God is about where God is the King, the Lord, where God has dominion. The Gospel is not just about saving people from sin, it is about re-establishing the dominion of God that Satan attempted to destroy. If God is not Lord of our life, it follows that we are not in His Kingdom.

Finally, through the deliverance of Christ by the preaching of the Gospel we enter the Kingdom of God. It is against this background that Peter is drawn to the New Kingdom. Why have I laboured this? It is because Peter is a child of his times and shaped by the teaching of his time. We must understand Peter's trials and tribulations in the light of this Gospel. We meet him at the first proclamation of it and we follow him as he comes to terms with its implications for his life and future.

11. Peter (fisher of Men).

We have tried to understand the religious background in which Simon Peter appears to us. He is a faithful Jew, he is not ignorant of the scripture and probably was a regular attendee at the synagogue at Capernaum. Perhaps he was one of those who expected the Kingdom of God but wondered like Simeon whether he would live to see it arrive (or die and enter it). It is a bit like us anticipating the return of Christ. Will it happen in our day or will we die and be part of it from the other side of life? There must have been many 'Peters' fishing up and down the coast of Galilee, dying in the faith and in obscurity but Peter is chosen.

He does not appear to be chosen for any special qualities, and these are not necessary because the Lord always prepares and equips His servants. For Peter, there will be two journeys ahead of him. There will be the journey of his ministry as an Apostle and there will be the journey of his soul, the making of the man, the moulding of the character that was to define him. These will be the transformations that we will examine and as they appear in terms of his relationship to Jesus. I would say that this is true for every follower of Jesus. We all develop our relationship and it is personal. I would also suggest that we all see Jesus in a far different light now than we did at our first meeting with Him. We all learn new things just as Peter did shortly after meeting Jesus.

One of the difficulties we face when studying the NT is how we relate the various Gospel accounts to each other. There is a presumption that they are all linear, that is, they all progress from the start and continue to relate events as time moves forward. This may seem logical but it assumes that is how the Gospels are written. John's Gospel may not support this idea since he is writing for a

particular purpose, *Joh 20:30 And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. Joh 20:31 But these are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye may have life through his name.* John is not writing a historic account like Luke (who writes in 'order'), he is writing a character narrative. I note this because it is one of the difficulties we encounter when attempting to create a 'Harmony of the Gospel'.

We have seen Matthew's account of the calling of Peter. *Mat 4:18 And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. Mat 4:19 And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. Mat 4:20 And they straightway left their nets, and followed him.* It is brief and to the point. Luke mentions something else, that is, if Luke is relating the same event.

Jesus has just finished preaching to the people *Luk 5:1 And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret, Luk 5:2 And saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets.* The fishermen had worked all night for nothing and they were reluctant to go out again.

Jesus invites them on a fishing trip and the results are unexpected. *Luk 5:6 And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake. Luk 5:7 And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink. Luk 5:8 When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; **for I am a sinful man**, O Lord. Luk 5:9 For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken:*

Why is Peter convicted of his sin? Why should a net full of fish create the conviction of sin? Sin 'revealed' creates a sense of guilt in us. I say sin revealed, because sin is so deceitful that it hides in us and we are often unaware of it as Paul observes, *Rom 7:7 What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.* The law of God awakens us to our sin but we are still guilty whether we are aware of it or not. *Lev 5:17 And if anyone does wrong, and does any of the things which the Lord has given orders are not to be done, though he has no knowledge of it, still he is in the wrong and he is responsible.* BBE. That is why God can judge all men irrespective of whether they have heard the Gospel, because ignorance is no excuse.

We might remind ourselves that David was quite oblivious of his sin against God when he fornicated with Bathsheba. It took the word of a prophet to expose his guilt. Guilt is what we feel when our sins are brought home to us and we realise that we have done wrong. People who do not have any conviction of sin will have no reason to seek Christ for forgiveness and that is one reason people do not become Christians.

When Adam sinned he hid himself from God because he knew that he was guilty of offending God. Adam knew that he had done something wrong and one of the responses to guilt is to hide from, or cover up the crime. We may alternatively decide to remove ourselves as far away from the scene of our crime as possible. We may try to remove ourselves from the company of our victims because they remind us of our sins. They become ghosts from our past that may one day rise up and haunt us.

When we are convicted of sin it is in relationship to something that we thought or did that was wrong when held up to the light of God's standard, the Law. When we are convicted, our previous attitude is completely upturned and we realise that we were totally wrong. If Peter was convicted when he saw a net full of fish, I suggest that his conviction was in relation to the events surrounding that catch and something that he did that was wrong is revealed to him. What was happening? Peter had been up all night fishing and caught nothing. I imagine that he was dog tired and ready for sleep, a comfy bed beckoned him. As he comes to the shore, he sees Jesus on the beach but he gets on with the task of cleaning the nets from the weed and debris of the fishing trip before he goes home. I do not think he is too interested in hearing a sermon and he is probably not overjoyed to be asked to go back out to sea again. However, he lets Jesus use his boat as a pulpit and afterwards, reluctantly sets out again to fish.

Peter knew about fishing, it was his life and I imagine that he thought in himself "this is a complete waste of time". After all, what did a carpenter know about fishing any more than a fisherman knew about woodwork? It would be a waste of time and effort to go out again, the fish were just not there. Who does this man think he is to give us orders? Yet in the event, Peter is proved wrong and the net is so full that it tore and there were so many fish that they filled the other boat that was with them so much so that they were on the verge of sinking, so full were they. The Galilean carpenter was absolutely right. Peter was absolutely wrong and no wonder he felt convicted for his unbelief.

What was Peter's sin? I suggest that he did not trust the word of Jesus and in that, he is no different to us. He is guilty of false witness. He did not believe that Jesus could help him catch anything but He does and that is the prelude to the logical concept, "that if You can catch fish, You can catch men". I further consider that once we know one sin, it is possible to know more sin and the dam can break as conviction cascades into our lives. Yet while it is true that one sin makes a sinner, it is not true that the conviction of a single sin makes us totally repentant, totally forgiven or totally converted.

Peter is a new disciple of Jesus and I suggest the he is being transformed through discipleship, the same as each of us. That involves the development of trust but when we are wrong, we push Jesus away. That is the last thing we should do because that is when we need Him closest. We say "depart from me" which is the last thing that we should say. It should be "come closer to me Lord" so that I might know you better and trust you more. As the hymn writer said,

O, dear Lord, three things I pray:
to see thee more clearly, love thee more dearly,
follow thee more nearly, day by day.

The devil who had such sway in Peter's early discipleship would have Peter push Jesus away but Jesus does not reject him. He does not rebuke him on this occasion, rather He encourages him. *Luk 5:10 And so was also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men. Luk 5:11 And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him.* I think that Peter is 'every Christian' by which I mean that there is Peter in all of us. His faltering steps, his blunders, his fears, his denials, his highs and lows are all ours. Such is discipleship but we can learn from Peter.

Did this event mark his conversion? This is a typical response to what has happened⁹:

Peter felt and owned that he was a man full of sin. He felt he had no right to be near Jesus, but Jesus could never depart from a poor broken-hearted sinner. It is His richest, deepest, joy to pour the healing balm of His love and grace into a wounded soul. It is His delight to heal the broken heart.

“And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men” (Luke 5:10). Here was the divine response to the cry of a contrite heart. The wound was deep, but the grace was deeper still. The soothing hand of a Saviour-God applied the precious remedy. Simon was not only convicted, but converted. He saw himself to be a man full of sin, but he saw the Saviour full of grace. There is grace in the heart of Jesus, as there is power in His blood, to meet the very worst of sinners.

I do not think that it proves anything about Peter’s state, let alone conversion. He has been convicted of a sin but it does not mean he is convicted of all sin. Besides, Judas Iscariot would also be a fisher of men for a while. I do not see that the cry of the contrite heart makes you a fisher of men.

The next event I want to draw your attention to is the selection of 12 disciples. *Luk 6:12 And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. Luk 6:13 And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, **whom also he named apostles**; Luk 6:14 Simon, (whom he also named Peter,) and Andrew his brother, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew, Luk 6:15 Matthew and Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called Zelotes, Luk 6:16 And Judas the brother of James, and **Judas Iscariot, which also was the traitor**.* Jesus had more than 12 disciples, *Luk 10:1 After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place, whither he himself would come.* It was out of this multitude that Jesus chose 12 who were titled Apostles, meaning persons that are sent or ambassadors.

Peter was chosen by Jesus as an ambassador of the Gospel an ambassador for Christ. We may understand by this that Jesus was happy to be represented by Peter. In view of what is to come in Peter’s life, naturally speaking, we would regard Peter as a risk to the Gospel. Jesus however knows exactly what Peter is like and what he will do, yet despite this he is chosen. The same goes for Judas Iscariot. Jesus knows that Peter will deny Him, that his faith wavers and He knows Peter is vulnerable to satan but He also sees beyond that, even to the point of Peter’s death. Peter is human but he will be triumphant through Christ. We must never be dismayed by what we are now, because what we are now does not permanently define us. Through Christ we get better.

The next significant event in Peter’s journey is only recorded by Matthew. It occurs after the miracle of the feeding of the 5000 men (plus women and children).

Mat 14:22 And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away. Mat 14:23 And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was

⁹ <https://mwtb.org/blogs/moments-for-you/26837889-peter-s-conversion>

*there alone. Mat 14:24 But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary. Mat 14:25 And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. Mat 14:26 And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. Mat 14:27 But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. Mat 14:28 And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. Mat 14:29 And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. Mat 14:30 But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. Mat 14:31 And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, **O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?** Mat 14:32 And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased. Mat 14:33 Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, **Of a truth thou art the Son of God.***

What on earth prompted Peter to do this act? Was it another temptation for Jesus? *Mat 14:28 Peter answered, "Lord, if it is you, order me to come to you on the water."* GW. Having never walked upon water, it does not seem an appropriate time for a first attempt. I think that I would have just sat down in the boat, kept quiet and waited for Jesus to come on board. But Peter is impulsive as we often are and yet it seems by this act shows us that he has a growing confidence in Jesus. If Jesus can walk on water, a thing never seen before and if Peter knew anything about physics, which he fortunately did not, it was not impossible. Jesus was a miracle worker.

What was it like to walk on water? I imagine that it was like walking on a bouncy castle, causing the body to adjust and balance as the waves beneath and the wind above buffeted Peter as he lowered his body over the side of the boat. I imagine a slight thrill of relief when Peter first put his foot down and found that it was firm to the touch if not a little wet.

As a child, I recall the time my mother took me out to a pond on a summer afternoon. There were lots of people sitting around, some were fishing. Near to the bank by some reeds was a covering of what is called 'duck weed'. To my tiny mind it looked like grass and I said so to my mother. When she wasn't looking I made my first and last attempt at walking upon water. My faith had been shaken by my ignorance. A green slimy little boy was pulled from the water by a passing man and the boy had to undergo the ignominy of being taken home naked in his brother's push chair with he sitting on me to cover my modesty. I never tried it again.

Walking on the water worked for Peter up to a point. It was fine to the point where he looked away from Jesus and regarded the conditions around him, then fear set in. The sea lost its resistance and slowly he began to sink. It is an example of the verse, *Php 4:13 I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.* We will not find that strength 'to do' if we are not doing it in Christ. The foolish boy who believed he could walk upon a pond did not have Christ. Peter did and Peter did what Christ had bid him to do, "Come" says Jesus and he does His bidding. If we Christians ever see an opportunity with and for Jesus, we should always ask first that He bids us do it. That is acting in faith. If we begin a work with Jesus, we must never look away from Him because that is when we fail. When the problem appears bigger than Jesus we are in real trouble.

Peter is called a 'little faith'. I do not think that it is derogatory, it is descriptive. Peter does not at this stage have 'big faith' he is a 'little faith'. I remind us that the object of all faith must be Christ. *Joh 20:31 But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that*

believing ye might have life through his name. Whatever we believe must be what comes from Jesus. If a man says, I believe in organic evolution, we say that we do not believe it on the basis that our faith in Christ contradicts that belief.

The next recorded interaction between Peter and Jesus occurs after the feeding of the 4000.

*Mat 16:13 When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? Mat 16:14 And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. Mat 16:15 He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? Mat 16:16 And **Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.** Mat 16:17 And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. Mat 16:18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and **upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.** Mat 16:19 And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Mat 16:20 Then charged he his disciples that **they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.***

It seems strange that at this stage there was any doubt as to who Jesus was. Signs and wonders had attested to His power, yet doubt prevailed in the general populous. He was certainly a Prophet and perhaps that was why He was confused with John, Elijah and Jeremiah. It is quite clear that Jesus was not out to declare Himself, that was not the mission. Just what did Jesus say about Himself? *Luk 4:18 The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because **he hath anointed me** to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, Luk 4:19 To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.....Luk 19:10 For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.*

You would of course have had to refer to the OT to understand the context of this message, to the 61st Chapter of Isaiah. The Spirit of Adonai Jehovah is upon the messenger of His covenant to preach the gospel of the Kingdom. It is not obvious to everyone that this is the Messiah, Christ, the anointed one but it is to the Galilean fisherman. Peter had this by revelation. *Mat 16:17 And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, **but my Father which is in heaven.***

Can you remember when you realised that Jesus was the Messiah. I do not mean, when did you first hear about Jesus the Messiah, Jesus Christ. I mean, "When did you realise who He really was?" The time you understood that He was the anointed of God, the one and only messenger of the covenant. When did it come home to you that Jesus was more than a sacrifice, more than a prophet, more than a preacher? I would probably be correct in thinking that it dawned later in your Christian development. It is one of those revelations that God gives us, like Peter as we grow in knowledge and transform.

I wonder how much these disciples talked with Jesus. I get the distinct impression that it was very limited and that on account of them being in total awe of Him. You might have just sat there looked at Jesus and wondered. Here after all was God incarnate and that must have created an effect. *Joh*

*1:14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and **we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,**) full of grace and truth.*

As Peter himself observes. *2Pe 1:16 For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were **eyewitnesses of his majesty**.* I am not sure you would want to say anything but just sit there and watch in awe as a disciple.

Peter has more obstacles to overcome. The biggest obstacle is perhaps his failure consider the consequences of his actions.

12. Peter (Rock to rubble).

Peter recognised who the Messiah was and the Messiah recognises Peter. The words that Jesus uses in response have been a bone of contention among denominations through the centuries. *Mat 16:18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and **upon this rock I will build my church**; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Mat 16:19 And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Mat 16:20 Then charged he his disciples that **they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.***

The Roman Catholic Church uses this verse to uphold the supremacy of the Apostle Peter as the first Bishop of Rome and the first pope. Furthermore, they consider every bishop of Rome to be Peter's successor and the rightful superior of all other bishops. Although Peter never bore the title of "Pope", or "Vicar of Christ", in this sense the Catholic Church considers Peter as the first pope¹⁰ upon whom God had chosen to build His church (Matthew 16:18). It holds that he had authority (primacy) over the other apostles. The Roman Catholic Church maintains that sometime after the recorded events of the book of Acts, the Apostle Peter became the first bishop of Rome, and that the Roman bishop was accepted by the early church as the central authority among all of the churches. It teaches that God passed Peter's apostolic authority to those who later filled his seat as bishop of Rome. This teaching that God passed on Peter's apostolic authority to the subsequent bishops is referred to as "apostolic succession."

The Roman Catholic Church also holds that Peter and the subsequent popes were and are infallible when addressing issues "ex cathedra", 'out of their seat' or from their position and authority as pope. It teaches that this infallibility gives the pope the ability to guide the church without error. The Roman Catholic Church claims that it can trace an unbroken line of popes back to St. Peter, citing this as evidence that it is the true church, since, according to their interpretation of Matthew 16:18, Christ built His church upon Peter.

This became a severe matter of contention between Protestantism and Catholicism and the dispute extended to question whether Peter even went to Rome. It is not my intention here to debate Catholicism against Protestantism. Neither institution has an elegant or decent history because we may pit pope against a fornicating Monarch Henry the eighth's 'Church of England' and find no scriptural support for either denomination, or come to that, any denominations at all.

¹⁰ <https://www.gotquestions.org/Peter-first-pope.html>

Was Peter the rock, the foundation upon which Jesus would build His church? It seems a strange thing to say or for Jesus to say anything at all if it did not involve Peter. I do not think that we can doubt that the Church is owned by Christ. *Eph 5:23 For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Col 1:18 And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.*

Does this rule out Peter being fundamental, foundational in the church? Jesus could have confined His remark to “*And I say also unto thee **I will build my church**; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*”. Is the Lord trying our understanding?

Is the Church an hierarchical organisation with people presiding over others? It has a head and a body but there is no chief part in the body, *1Co 12:18 But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. 1Co 12:19 And if they were all one member, where were the body? 1Co 12:20 But now are they many members, yet but one body.* In the opening verse of that great letter to the Roman Church Paul calls himself a servant, *Rom 1:1 **Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ**, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God*, Peter had the same calling, *2Pe 1:1 **Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ**, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ:*

Whatever Jesus intended to say to Peter, Peter never forgot that he was a servant of the Church. That is how Peter saw himself. *Mar 10:42 Jesus called the apostles and said, "You know that the acknowledged rulers of nations have absolute power over people and their officials have absolute authority over people. Mar 10:43 But that's not the way it's going to be among you. Whoever wants to become great among you will be your servant. Mar 10:44 **Whoever wants to be most important among you will be a slave for everyone.** Mar 10:45 It's the same way with the Son of Man. He didn't come so that others could serve him. He came to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many people."* GW.

These verses are explained by Protestantism “based upon the name Peter (Πέτρος = Petros) meaning “rock” or “rock-man.” In the next phrase Jesus used *petra* (πέτρα, upon this rock), a feminine form for “rock,” not a name. Christ used a play on words they say. He does not say “upon you, Peter” or “upon your successors,” but “upon this rock” as pointing to Himself. Upon this Divine revelation and upon profession of faith in Me (Christ). Thus by this Christ is not using Peter as a foundation for the Church.” This may be so but it does not adequately explain Jesus’ comment to Peter.

It says in *Eph 2:20 And are built upon **the foundation of the apostles and prophets**, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; Eph 2:21 In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord:* Like Peter, we are stones that make up the Spiritual House of God. *1Pe 2:3 If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious. 1Pe 2:4 To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, 1Pe 2:5 **Ye also, as lively stones**, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. 1Pe 2:6 Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.* Christ as the cornerstone that holds the building together.

So while I do not see Peter as the single foundation of the Church, he is certainly part of it, yet there is more, *Mat 16:19 And I will give unto thee (singular) the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.* Catholicism puts these keys as part of its papal insignia and hence authority over the Church.

We must enquire what these keys signify. Firstly the keys are not the sole property of Peter, *Mat 18:18 Verily I say unto you (plural), Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Mat 18:19 Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.*

The context of Matthew chapter 18 is dealing with trespasses between brethren in the Church. The ultimate decision on the issue is decided by the church and not by an individual and certainly not an Apostle. *Mat 18:17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Mat 18:18 Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.* The Church, that is the body of believers, is the final arbiter in the matter.

The result of being a heathen and a publican is that they are put outside of the Kingdom. The heathen (ἔθνικός = ethnikos whence our word ethnic) is one who is outside of the church and has rejected the faith. These 'heathens and publicans' will not listen to the Church and in this case it is because they will not forgive. The decision of the Church is binding. It is binding on earth and it is binding in heaven. A person who walks away from the decision of the Church, based upon the word of God has nowhere to go. They cannot join another group in order to disannul a godly decision that is binding on all. The keys close the door on the matter.

Jesus further asks, after this revelation of the fact that He is the Messiah, that His identity be kept secret, at least for the present time. *Mat 16:20 Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.* How strange that they will go out and preach the Kingdom without revealing the King? Perhaps it is because we each have to find that King, the Messiah, for ourselves.

Immediately after this 'high point' Peter falls into another valley. The satanic attack, what we have called demonization (not possession) sneaks upon him. Peter knows Jesus is the Messiah, God told him so. What Peter had not fully understood was why the Messiah would suffer and the devil will use this ignorance as he uses our ignorance too. Jesus makes this clear on the Emmaus road but Peter did not understand it. *Luk 24:46 And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day:*

The death of Christ, the Messiah is foretold in Daniel, *Dan 9:26 And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined.* We may think on why Jesus did not make this plain earlier in His ministry and perhaps it was to avoid the confrontation that He has with Peter.

Mat 16:21 From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Mat 16:22 Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee. Mat 16:23 But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.

Peter did not understand the necessity of Christ death and nature of the sacrifice and so he takes Jesus aside. What transpired must have been given to Matthew by Peter. *Mat 16:22 Peter took him aside and objected to this. He said, "Heaven forbid, Lord! This must never happen to you!"* GW. Dear Peter's good intention is demonic and the devil is playing 'mind games' with him. Sometimes we are unaware of how close satan is to us and as I have remarked elsewhere, the devil speaks to our minds with his own voice and makes it sound like our voice, the thoughts that are running through our head are not our own.

The devil did not want Jesus dead. Strange you may think but the devils know they have but a short time and Jesus death sounds the death knell for them. *Rev 12:12 Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.* If satan can stop the death of Jesus, then the plan of redemption fails.

You will say, surely the devil wanted to kill Jesus by tempting Him to jump off of the Temple? Not so, the devil was trying to get Jesus to tempt God. *Mat 4:6 And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Mat 4:7 Jesus said unto him, It is written again, **Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.***

If Jesus does not die, it does not affect His Divinity or Kingship. He is still Lord of the Kingdom of Heaven but He will have no redeemed citizens in Heaven. Men will continue to die in their sins on earth even if they follow Him for a lifetime. They would not be redeemed and that I suggest is why satan wanted to 'save' Jesus from death, **so that Jesus could not save us from death.** Peter did not understand this and so offers his protection to Jesus.

We might despise what Peter did as unchristian, yet I believe that many churches hide the Cross, the death of Christ from people. It is hidden in the Church, the home, the workplace, in families and because we do not appreciate its transformational significance, we do the devil's own work. If we do not preach the death of Christ, we will watch the dead who surround us remain dead and die in sin.

A third of Church of England clergy doubt or disbelieve in the physical Resurrection and only half are convinced of the truth of the Virgin birth, according to one survey¹¹. The poll of nearly 2,000 of the Church's 10,000 clergy also found that only half believe that faith in Christ is the only route to salvation. While it has long been known that numerous clerics are dubious about the historic creeds of the Church, the survey is the first to disclose how widespread the scepticism is. A number of bishops would now share the views of the former Bishop of Durham, the Rt Rev David Jenkins, who

¹¹ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1403106/One-third-of-clergy-do-not-believe-in-the-Resurrection.html>

caused a scandal in the 1980s when he contrasted the Resurrection with a "conjuring trick with bones".

According to a recent Barna survey¹²:

"Younger generations are increasingly less likely to believe Jesus was God. The historicity of Jesus may not be in question for most Americans, but people are much less confident in the divinity of Jesus. Most adults—not quite six in ten—believe Jesus was God (56%), while about one-quarter say he was only a religious or spiritual leader like Mohammed or the Buddha (26%). The remaining one in six say they aren't sure whether Jesus was divine (18%). Millennials are the only generation among whom fewer than half believe Jesus was God (48%). About one-third of young adults (35%) say instead that Jesus was merely a religious or spiritual leader, while 17 percent aren't sure what he was. In each older generation, the belief in Jesus as divine is more common—55 percent of Gen-Xers, 58 percent of Boomers and nearly two-thirds of Elders (62%) believe Jesus was God."

The importance of the Deity of Christ and the death and resurrection of Christ is critical to the salvation of mankind. Why? Because if Jesus is an ordinary man, then He is a sinful man and He cannot save. Because He is God, He is sinless and that is why He can save. Any perversion of the person and work of Christ undermines that work. It undermines faith. People who propagate lies are satanic because satan is the father of the lie.

What then occurs to Peter seems harsh, especially in the light of Peter's acknowledgement that Jesus is the Messiah. It must have cut him like a knife when he heard the words "Get behind me satan". It was not just that he had offended Jesus, it was also that he was vulnerable to the attacks of satan.

That marks another transformation in our lives. I do not think that any one of us who come to Christ fully understands the nature of spiritual warfare. I do not hear modern evangelists telling us that we are the children of satan, that the devil is at work in our lives, *Eph 2:2 Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:*

The evangelists do not confront us with who we truly are, Jesus does, *Mat 12:34 O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.* I wonder how many Christians truly understand the reality of which we speak. I ask that because four of the seven churches of Revelation are in direct conflict with satan but I do not know one Church in this age that would admit that.

When Jesus deals with satan, His rebuke contains a command that He has used elsewhere. *Luk 4:7 If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine. Luk 4:8 And Jesus answered and said unto him, **Get thee behind me, Satan:** for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.* It was the offer of the world for worship. The devil offered their glory also, *Luk 4:6 And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it.*

¹² <https://www.barna.com/research/what-do-americans-believe-about-jesus-5-popular-beliefs/>

The truth of that statement is questionable. Yet it is a similar approach to the one the devil adopted when he gave Peter his thought. It was about winning the world and the world's resources without death. It was by-passing the Cross. The devil stands in the way of the Cross on both occasions and offers Christ alternative paths. The devil does the same for all humanity. The devil stands in front of the Cross to hide it, to suggest that there are other ways to glory and that is the big lie. There are no other ways.

That is why I think that Jesus, on both occasions, says "get behind me satan". "Get out of my way devil". We should recognise that satan will not just stand in our way, he will block our vision too. He will put himself between us and the future, obscuring it and distorting it. That is why his place is behind us. Every time that we struggle with temptation and the future seems clouded, we need to recognise the adversary is at work. That is when we put him in his place, behind us. Peter was shown a different future for Jesus by satan and it was a total lie.

Peter is a man who, to use the Wild West analogy, 'shoots from the hip'. He fires off before the gun is out of the holster, so the shot is quick but not accurate. It is part of his seeming rash and impetuous behaviour. Whatever comes into Peter's mind is immediately broadcast through his mouth. In one sense he seems quite an endearing character, always trying hard to please his Lord, yet he is by the same token a disaster waiting to happen.

He is the child of God in us all, growing slowly, stumbling through life, increasing in knowledge, making mistakes but all the while staying the course. He is a rock with rough edges. He needs to be moulded for His Master's use. He needs shaping and refining and when it is finished there will be a polished stone and a pile of rubble beside it. We may end up smaller than when we started out but we are far more precious. *Mal 3:16 Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. Mal 3:17 And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.*

As Peter grows spiritually, we shall see less impetuosity and more considered action. What I believe is happening is that Peter is being conformed to the Word of God. *Rom 12:2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*

That 'will of God' as revealed in the word of God, gives us another 'World view' and it is not 'this world'. Peter is developing another world view.

13. Peter (in denial).

This transfiguration on the Mount is a significant meeting. Moses and Elijah, the representatives of the Law and the Prophets discuss the New Exodus as we have already seen in our introduction, setting the context for Peter's life. Moses had already participated in an Exodus and now Jesus would do the same. He would lead his people out of bondage just as Moses had done.

Peter, as is his nature, makes a comment which on the face of it seems quite uninformed. *Mar 9:5 And Peter answered and said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. Mar 9:6 For he wist not what to say;*

for they were sore afraid. Luke supplies us more information. *Luk 9:32 But Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep: and when they were awake, they saw his glory, and the two men that stood with him. Luk 9:33 And it came to pass, as they departed from him, Peter said unto Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles (σκηνή = skēnē); one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias: **not knowing what he said.***

It was almost a dream sequence from which Peter arouses himself, to see a glorious sight. I will suggest that Peter speaks in a prophetic manner. He does not understand what he says, like prophets of old, *1Pe 1:11 Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.* Did Peter have this experience in mind when he spoke of these three tabernacles?

The Greek word that Peter uses for tabernacle is 'tent' (σκηνή = skēnē). It is used of Jesus body, *Joh 1:14 And the Word became flesh and **tabernacled** among us. And we beheld His glory, glory as of an only begotten from the Father, full of grace and of truth.* LITV.

In the Older Testament (LXX), the word 'tent' (σκηνή = skēnē) is used to describe the Tabernacle of the Testimony. *Exo 25:8 And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them. Exo 25:9 According to all that I shew thee, after the pattern of **the tabernacle**, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it.* In Leviticus it is used to describe the temporary dwelling of the feast of Tabernacles. *Lev 23:34 Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the feast of tabernacles for seven days unto the LORD.* The Hebrew for tabernacle here is Succoth (סֻכּוֹת = Succoth) or booth.

I believe that this statement of Peter's will prove to be further confirmation of the conversation concerning the 'Exodus'. It is unfortunate that most translations do not understand the importance of this and render the Greek word 'Exodus' as 'departure'. Jesus has here spoken of His Exodus to the Older Testament prophets, *Luk 9:30 And, behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah. Luk 9:31 Appearing in glory, they spoke of His Exodus, which He was about to accomplish in Jerusalem.* LITV.

I will go further and suggest that when Peter speaks, he is speaking prophetically. What he says, ties the conversation about the new Exodus with an event which is associated with that first Exodus. It was something that became an annual ritual for the Jews and it still occurs among the Orthodox Jews today (**Picture, Succoth on the balconies of tenement in New York**). It involved living in temporary accommodation, tents or 'booths'.



These were made of fabric or leaves. The event marked the occasion on the journey from Rameses to Succoth after Pharaoh forced the children of Israel to leave Egypt. Succoth means 'booths' and it was the place of the first camp. *Exo 12:37 And the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand on foot that were men, beside children.* Later this event was commemorated in a feast and is recorded in the Law.

Lev 23:39 Also in the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when ye have gathered in the fruit of the land, ye shall keep a feast unto the LORD seven days: on the first day shall be a sabbath, and on the eighth day shall be a sabbath. Lev 23:40 And ye shall take you on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook; and ye shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days. Lev 23:41 And ye shall keep it a feast unto the LORD seven days in the year. It shall be a statute for ever in your generations: ye shall celebrate it in the seventh month. Lev 23:42 Ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths: Lev 23:43 **That your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.** Lev 23:44 And Moses declared unto the children of Israel the feasts of the LORD.

Peter in some confusion, is drawn back to this event and hence his outburst. He is in a manner of speaking, celebrating 'Succoth' or the feast of tabernacles, anticipating the deliverance by Jesus from this present evil world. Peter sees the need for a place to rest after the Exodus but it will not be his to build, even though he is typologically correct. It will be left to our Lord to build the new tabernacles. We are reminded of Jesus words, *Joh 14:2 In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.* It is not Peter who will build the tabernacles it is Jesus.

Peter is next singled out to answer another question. *Mat 17:24 And they having come to Capernaum, those receiving the didrachms came near to Peter, and said, 'Your teacher--doth he not pay the didrachms?' He saith, 'Yes.'* *Mat 17:25 And when he came into the house, Jesus anticipated him, saying, 'What thinkest thou, Simon? the kings of the earth--from whom do they receive custom or poll-tax? from their sons or from the strangers?'* *Mat 17:26 Peter saith to him, 'From the strangers.'* *Jesus said to him, 'Then are the sons free; Mat 17:27 but, that we may not cause them to stumble, having gone to the sea, cast a hook, and the fish that hath come up first take thou up, and having opened its mouth, thou shalt find a stater, that having taken, give to them for me and thee.'* YLT.

I wonder if Peter looked a little doubtful or sheepish when he answered Jesus question? Peter had not been doing too well with his answers of late. "From strangers?" he ventures. He is correct on this occasion. This is not the Roman tax, it is the Jewish Temple tax set up by Moses in the law. *Exo 30:13 'This they do give, every one passing over unto those numbered, half a shekel, by the shekel of the sanctuary (the shekel is twenty gerahs); half a shekel is the heave-offering to Jehovah;*

It was used for general maintenance of the Tabernacle/Temple. 2Ch 24:4 And it came to pass after this, that Joash was minded to repair the house of the LORD. 2Ch 24:5 And he gathered together the priests and the Levites, and said to them, Go out unto the cities of Judah, and gather of all Israel money to repair the house of your God from year to year, and see that ye hasten the matter. Howbeit the Levites hastened it not. 2Ch 24:6 And the king called for Jehoiada the chief, and said unto him, Why hast thou not required of the Levites to bring in out of Judah and out of Jerusalem the collection, according to the commandment of Moses the servant of the LORD, and of the congregation of Israel, for the tabernacle of witness? 2Ch 24:7 For the sons of Athaliah, that wicked woman, had broken up the house of God; and also all the dedicated things of the house of the LORD did they bestow upon Baalim. 2Ch 24:8 And at the king's commandment they made a chest, and set it without at the gate

of the house of the LORD. 2Ch 24:9 *And they made a proclamation through Judah and Jerusalem, to bring in to the LORD the collection that Moses the servant of God laid upon Israel in the wilderness.* It was probably this collection chest that the widow cast her two mites into in Jesus day.

Is the point of the story, just that Jesus paid Peter's and His didrachmas from a coin found on the mouth of a fish? That some man having picked up his wages, on his way home perhaps, leans over the harbour wall and a coin fall out of his pocket and a passing fish gobbled it up thinking it was food and then Peter comes along later, just in the right place and catches it? A story about a chain of providential events. Was it right to pay it from someone else's pocket? Let us not be side tracked.

The whole event is another lesson to Peter about who Jesus is. The Kings of the earth have a right to draw tribute or poll tax from the citizens, but the King's sons are free from this. They do not have to pay their father any tax. *"Then are the sons free"*. This revelation to Peter draws him even closer to Jesus. Jesus is saying in effect that He and Peter are brothers because they have the same Father. They pay the same poll tax from the same source.

This is another transformation that we make in our Christian lives. We get to a point in our relationship with Our Lord, that He becomes more than just a sacrifice. He becomes our brother. He is not just a person to venerate, someone to know and hold at a distance. John Wesley wrote a hymn that sums up this thought:

Jesu, my Saviour, Brother, Friend,
On Whom I cast my every care,
On Whom for all things I depend,
Inspire, and then accept, my prayer.

There is yet a lower valley for Peter to cross and it comes at what has been called 'The last supper'. It is the denial of Jesus. *Mat 26:30 And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives. Mat 26:31 Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. Mat 26:32 But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee. Mat 26:33 Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended. Mat 26:34 Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. Mat 26:35 Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples.*

Before we explore this, we must ask what it means to 'deny' a person. It means to refuse or admit the existence of a person or proposition. For example to deny the resurrection is to say that it never happened or could not happen. To deny a person is to say that you have no knowledge of them or association with them.

Observe that it was not just Peter alone who denied our Lord, ***"Likewise also said all the disciples"***. All of the disciples joined in Peter's sentiment and it must follow that all of the disciples betrayed Jesus to some degree. Yet it is dear Peter who is singled out for mention. Luke gives us the full account of the betrayal.

*Luk 22:54 Then took they him, and led him, and brought him into the high priest's house. And Peter followed afar off. Luk 22:55 And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them. Luk 22:56 But a certain maid beheld him as he sat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him, and said, This man was also with him. Luk 22:57 And he denied him, saying, Woman, I know him not. Luk 22:58 And after a little while another saw him, and said, Thou art also of them. And Peter said, Man, I am not. Luk 22:59 And about the space of one hour after another confidently affirmed, saying, Of a truth this fellow also was with him: for he is a **Galilaean**. Luk 22:60 And Peter said, Man, I know not what thou sayest. And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew. Luk 22:61 **And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter.** And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. Luk 22:62 And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.*

After Jesus is taken, Peter follows Him at a distance. It is John that gets him access into the hall. *Joh 18:15 And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple: that disciple was known unto the high priest, and went in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest. Joh 18:16 But Peter stood at the door without. Then went out that other disciple, which was known unto the high priest, and spake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter.* Peter is recognised by his Galilean accent and he is recognised by this person as an associate of Jesus. Following his third denial Jesus turns and looks at him. What did that look speak to Peter? Not a word of rebuke, just a look that says it all. I told you so!

Peter must have turned away in utter despair. A follower for such a long time, a disciple, a preacher of the Kingdom, yet when it really counted, he threw it all out, as if it had never happened, as if it was all worthless. I imagine that when he realised exactly what he had done, he felt suicidal. Was he so little different to Judas Iscariot? Both were called to discipleship, both were Apostles, both were abused by satan, both denied Christ. Yes, Judas got paid silver for his denial but surely that is a lesser crime compared with Peter's who did it for nothing.

What would have happened if Judas had just held on, just discussed it with the others, would he have been forgiven by the risen Jesus? *Psa 41:9 Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me. Psa 41:10 But thou, O LORD, be merciful unto me, and raise me up, that I may requite them.* I think that Judas was like Esau, *Heb 12:17 For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.*

I can see no reason that Judas should perished other than it was appointed. It was written in scripture *Joh 17:12 While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled.* Many other sinners have found forgiveness but Judas never did. We might suggest that some people act too quickly in despair as Judas did, not knowing that while there is life there is hope. There is no hope in death for the wicked.

This may serve as a cautionary tale to wayward Christians. Peter it seems, held on and sought forgiveness. It must make us consider how loyal are Christ's disciples when the going gets tough? That includes us. That denial must cover the denial of Christ by denial of His principles for living.

I know many who would deny Christ at the expense of upsetting relationships with colleagues, friends, family and especially their children. They are more afraid of people than they are of God. There are those who follow at a distance but when they are publicly associated with Christ, when they have the opportunity to speak up for Christ, they are silent. When the word of God says that we should act in a certain manner, believe certain things and we go contrary to it, that is denial.

If we are presented with a teaching that contains a Bible truth, we should be diligent to confirm that it is indeed a godly requirement. If we are sure that it is a true teaching, then we are obligated to implement it in our lives. For example, if we are taught that we should be baptised as a believer and that this is a clear requirement of Christ in scripture, we have a choice. We can obey or we can disobey. There is no middle ground, no neutrality, *Luk 11:23 He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth.* If we disobey the truth, we deny the truth. If that is the case, are we any different to Peter or Judas?

Mat 7:21 Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Mat 7:22 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? Mat 7:23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. I paraphrase these verses to this. “You did not want to know me, I do not want to know you”.

Is there a way back if we do deny the truth? The answer must be that it depends on the sincerity with which we pursue that, the **sincerity** of our repentance. The desire to get back and go on. *Luk 22:31 And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: Luk 22:32 But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted (ἐπιστρέφω = epistrephō), strengthen thy brethren. Luk 22:33 And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death. Luk 22:34 And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me.*

Peter has two things in his favour. Firstly Jesus has prayed that his faith will hold out. Secondly, he will turn the corner. The word ‘converted’ means ‘turning about’, ‘turning around’ or ‘returning’. Peter will survive. I do not think that this should be viewed as a single occurrence in a disciple’s life. Where ever we go off course, there must be a turning back.

I close by briefly looking at the resurrection and Peter’s association with it.

*Mar 16:1 And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him.....Mar 16:6 And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him. Mar 16:7 But go your way, **tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee:** there shall ye see him, as he said unto you.*

Luk 24:11 And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not. Luk 24:12 Then arose Peter, and ran unto the sepulchre; and stooping down, he beheld the linen clothes laid by themselves, and departed, wondering in himself at that which was come to pass.

Joh 20:6 Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie, Joh 20:7 And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself. Joh 20:8 Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed. Joh 20:9 For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead. Joh 20:10 Then the disciples went away again unto their own home.

Joh 21:1 After these things Jesus shewed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias; and on this wise shewed he himself. Joh 21:2 There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples. Joh 21:3 Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing.

History is almost repeating itself. Peter catches nothing, just like that other night of wasted labour when he first met Jesus. D.V. we shall continue our journey with Peter and try to understand how he transforms his life from this, the lowest of low points in his life.

14. Peter (the other side of the Cross).

I asked the question “Why does scripture not mention explicitly that Jesus forgave Peter?” The question is misleading, since it depends what we mean by ‘explicitly’. Jesus did not say to Peter, “I forgive you”, but I will try to show how He did forgive Peter.

We continue to follow Peter in John’s Gospel at a barbecue Jesus had set up on the beach. *Joh 21:5 Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No. Joh 21:6 And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes. Joh 21:7 Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher’s coat unto him, (for he was naked,) and did cast himself into the sea. Joh 21:8 And the other disciples came in a little ship; (for they were not far from land, but as it were two hundred cubits,) dragging the net with fishes.*

Peter was in the nude as he fished but as soon as John points out Jesus, he throws some clothes on. It seems a strange thing to mention, unless it is meant to draw us back to the Garden of Eden. Peter in the presence of God is acutely aware of his sin and like Adam seeks covering. Jesus does not have to make any mention of Peter’s recent denial, the man is only too conscious of his sin.

I would make an observation that when a person is labouring under sin, it is little help to them to tell them what they already know. Our Lord does not burden the convicted sinner but redirects them, as He does the rich man. *Mar 10:21 Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me.* Jesus does not lecture Peter on his

sin, “Look Peter, when you denied me, it did not reflect well on you, I am sure it upset you and it also upset me.....”

I remember once at work, I made a mistake and failed to observe a protocol because I wanted to push on with the job. A bit like Peter. I was duly brought up to account and I could see that my antagonists wanted to make something of the matter. I owned up, acknowledged my fault and refused to get into any discussion. What was the point? I was not going to lie and say I was right when I was not. There is nothing to be gained by pursuing someone who acknowledges their wrong unless it is to be vindictive.

A person who is in open sin but refusing to acknowledge it is treated differently, *Luk 11:38 And when the Pharisee saw it, he marvelled that he had not first washed before dinner. Luk 11:39 And the Lord said unto him, Now do ye Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and the platter; but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness.* It is a principle that Christianity should adopt to keep the Churches clean. *1Ti 5:20 Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.*

Jesus questions Peter’s love for Him, not I suggest in any negative manner. There are no points to be won here since the matter of Peter’s denial and his personal grief has been acknowledged by his guilt. This is a time to heal and a time to build up. It is this ‘building up’ that is the restoration of Peter and it is also his forgiveness. Do not think for a moment that this forgiveness has come about without any conviction of sin or repentance.

Forgiveness with Jesus is not just in word, it carries with it the blessing of responsibility and duty. It brings with it trust. A man whose sins are forgiven goes on to do something. He cannot bask in a static forgiveness, he must needs go on and serve. His life is no longer his own. *1Pe 4:1 Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, **arm yourselves likewise with the same mind:** for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; 1Pe 4:2 **That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.** 1Pe 4:3 For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: 1Pe 4:4 Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you:* If we have been changed, the change must show itself in a changed life.

Perhaps the greatest indication of forgiveness is this, that it brings a deep love for Jesus. *Luk 7:47 Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; **for she loved much:** but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.* The love that a person will have for Christ will be in proportion to the degree of forgiveness that they have experienced. That in turn will reflect the level of personal conviction of sin.

Here is Jesus’ conversation with Peter. *Joh 21:14 This is now the third time that Jesus shewed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead. Joh 21:15 So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest (ἀγαπάω = agapaō) thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love (φιλέω = phileō) thee. He saith unto him, **Feed my lambs.** Joh 21:16 He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest (ἀγαπάω) thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love (φιλέω) thee. He saith unto him, **Feed my***

sheep. *Joh 21:17 He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest (φιλέω) thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest (φιλέω) thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love (φιλέω) thee. Jesus saith unto him, **Feed my sheep.** Joh 21:18 Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. Joh 21:19 This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, **Follow me.***

Before looking at the Jesus' conversation with Peter, we need to understand something of the nature of love. I remind us that God does not love everybody. *Rom 9:13 As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.* Clearly Jacob could not say that God loved him.

Do you think that love is giving people what they like, want or demand? That is far from the case. It is more about giving people what they need. The neighbourly Samaritan met the need of the traveller. If the traveller had been lying drunk and requesting a few more cans of beer, I think that the response would have been quite different and a stay at the Inn certainly off limits. We also do not know if the traveller was Jewish or gentile but that is not the point of the story. It is a challenge to OUR neighbourliness. I must also point out that Jesus ministry is with a few exceptions, entirely focused upon the nation of Israel, the Jews.

If you love your neighbour, you will **also be involved in sanctions** against the neighbour if he breached the law. *Lev 19:17 Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: **thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him.*** If we say that we love the sinner, then it should follow that we want to get him to change. *Jas 5:19 Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Jas 5:20 Let him know, **that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.*** Just continuing in an idle association, saying nothing, just confirms the person in their sin. Why? Well, they must be alright because we said nothing about it.

Unconditional love is a lie of the devil and if we believe that lie, we will do our neighbour more harm than good. Love shows itself in duty and primarily our duty to the Creator, then to our neighbour. It does not mean that we will 'like' every person or even respect them beyond the point of recognizing that they are made in God's image. We have a problem with certain human behaviours and in consequence hate those behaviours but we are duty bound to 'love' that individual. That love extends to the murderer, the pervert, the thief, the adulterer, the homosexualist. God will punish them for their sins, not you or me and it is not our job to exact vengeance.

Having said that, I do **not** believe that we are duty bound to 'like' everybody. I must be careful here but I do not see that Jesus said that we should 'like' your neighbour. The word 'like' means to have pleasure in, or enjoy, such as "I like ice cream". It is pleasurable. I like 'so and so' means that I enjoy his/her company, that they are pleasant to be with and that they are people I can be at ease with, confide in and trust. It is the boundary of friendship which I suggest, separates the duty of love, from the friendship of love. *Pro 17:17 A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.* This does not mean that relationships with a friend will always run smoothly. It does mean that when things get difficult, the friend will be there for us. This verse is a filter that separates the fair weather

friend from the true friend. The true friend has the characteristics of Jesus and never runs away from you and never leaves you.

I do not believe that it is possible to have true friendship with an unbeliever. You may have an acquaintance but they can never be your friend in Jesus. Unequal yokes are never God's way. I will go further and suggest that while we are to love our fellow believers, it can also be very hard to like them. There are even people who name Christ that I find quite obnoxious. I would rather spend an hour at the dentist than with some so called 'Christians', but you will say that I have a problem and that may be so, however, I find it is because there is so little of Christ in them. Friendship, fellowship, feelings, trust, closeness take time to grow. Thank God it will happen, eventually.

I will take the thought even further. I will suggest that you cannot undertake any lasting work for the Lord unless you love Jesus. You may want to do great things, help people, save people, heal people, preach to people but if it is all of self and for self, to satisfy a need in us it is worthless if the love for Christ is absent. It is selfish unless the love for Christ is present and primary. It must be above all that we think or do.

I knew a person who had great compassion for the sick. If they had the gift of healing the National Health Service would have been out of business in a week. The impression that I had was that this desire to heal was satisfying an inner need not focused on Jesus. It was a desire to remove suffering because it hurt that person's own feelings and sensitivities. It was to remove that personal pain rather than being a desire to serve Jesus and love Jesus. It was a love that was not subservient to the love of Jesus.

That I suggest is why people have trouble loving the sinner (I did not say like). It is because they put their own criteria ahead of Jesus' criteria. What happens is that our own sensitivities, our own judgements, preferences, hurts and feelings come ahead of our love for Christ. People use personal offence as an excuse not to love people. Because I am offended, I cannot love that person. Well that is not the way it works. Let us ask ourselves, "Are we more concerned for our feeling being offended than offences against our Saviour?"

Love, agape, is not based on our feelings, it is based upon service to others as Christ has loved us. It is constrained by Christ. *2Co 5:14 For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead:..... 2Co 5:14 For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; 2Co 5:15 and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.* ESV.

The first rule of discipleship is that everything is subservient to Christ. *Luk 14:26 If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he **cannot be my disciple**. Luk 14:27 And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, **cannot be my disciple**.* We are to love people but it is never to be above our love for Christ. Vance Havner put it beautifully, "**The primary qualification for a missionary is not love for souls, as we so often hear, but love for Christ**". I have never heard this put strongly in churches but

again, I seldom see discipleship as a focus of ministry. I read this week that some churches are taking 'repentance' out of the Alpha course because they do not want to cause offence!

We should from the beginning make it quite clear to all new 'converts' that Jesus is above all things. There is no point in continuing under false pretences if the love for Christ is not paramount. Why do we fail to do this? It is I believe, because we do not want to upset people and put them off of Christianity. Well, Jesus is not afraid to do that. If we cannot call Him Lord of all, He is not Lord at all. *Luk 6:46 And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? Luk 6:47 Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like:* When Jesus questions Peter about his love for Him, it is fundamental to Peter's and any other person's ministry. We talk too much about the love of God for us and too little about our love for God. Jesus is quite right to question our love for Him, and so should we.

I think that the purpose of this threefold questioning is a reflection upon the threefold denial. It is drawing Peter back. It is forgiveness in practice because genuine forgiveness restores relationships. Are we right to draw a distinction between 'agape' and 'phileo'? Why use two words if they mean the same thing? Yet *"Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest (φιλέω) thou me?"* Here Peter is grieved because his love is questioned a third time but the word Jesus uses is not agape (as in the previous two questions) but phileo. The implication here is that the words have a similar meaning.

If as we have suggested before (Jesus the Healer) that agape, is the love that shows itself in duty and phileo in affection and friendship, we might suggest that Jesus is drawing out duty before friendship. If Peter will do what he is supposed to do, then he lays the basis for friendship. I would say that is reasonable.

Is it just Peter who has his love questioned or is it us also? *Joh 14:21 He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, **he it is that loveth me**: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and **I will love him**, and will manifest myself to him. Joh 14:22 Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world? Joh 14:23 Jesus answered and said unto him, **If a man love me, he will keep my words**: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. Joh 14:24 He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me.*

It is quite clear that a disobedient person "**loveth me not**". The devil has convinced people that they can enjoy the love of God, the benevolence of God and the peace of God without any reference to obedience. It is a wicked lie. Jesus judges our love to Him by the way we keep His words. This is another transformation in our lives and it occurs when we begin to love Jesus because we did not love Him at the outset. *1Jn 4:10 Herein is love, **not that we loved God**, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.* Like Peter, we find our love in question and we move closer to Jesus as a consequence.

That love for Jesus is the basis of responsibility. The servant will act well because he loves his Master. He is not a hireling and in consequence, Peter then is given a task as a Shepherd, a Pastor but his curiosity extends to question what Jesus will do with the other disciple. "What about him?"

Joh 21:20 Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following; which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee? Joh 21:21 Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus replies, Joh 21:22 Jesus said to Peter, "If I want him to live until I come again, how does that concern you? Follow me!" In other words, Peter, 'mind your own business'. You get on with the task that I have given you and let Me worry about John.

If ever there was verse about not controlling other Christian's vocations it is this one.

Here is another transformation. When we know our calling, we must relentlessly pursue it. What the Lord does with other people is His business and if He has not shared it with you, it is none of your business. While it is clear that Peter is restored, he must still know his place that the servant is not above his master and he is not above the other servants.

15. Peter (the pastor).

Peter is now back on track to fulfil his Divine calling. As Our Lord leaves, Peter takes up as it were His mantle as Elisha did of Elijah when he ascended, *2Ki 2:13 Then he picked up Elijah's coat (which had fallen off Elijah), went back, and stood on the bank of the Jordan River.* Peter and the Apostles will now represent Christ on earth as we should too. They will act in 'Jesus Name', *Act 3:6 Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: **In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth** rise up and walk.*

Jesus gives Peter a task and that was to be a shepherd, a pastor, but not just any pastor. He was to pastor the Sheep of Christ. He is no different to all the other pastors that will arise in the Churches. *1Pe 5:1 I, a fellow elder, exhort the elders among you, I being also witness of the sufferings of Christ, and being sharer of the glory about to be revealed: 1Pe 5:2 Shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight, not by compulsion, but willingly; nor eagerly for base gain, but readily; 1Pe 5:3 nor as exercising lordship over the ones allotted to you, but becoming examples of the flock. 1Pe 5:4 And at the appearing of the Chief Shepherd, you will receive the never fading crown of glory.* This is a high calling because the pastor is acting in loco Christi, in the place of Christ.

I wonder why it is today that there are so many pastors and so few of the other gifts of Christ to the Church, the apostles, prophets, evangelists and teachers? *Eph 4:11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; Eph 4:12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:* Yes, it does not say what proportion of each are given, but I stress **they are given**, not self-made. A pastor must know that he is called and gifted to the church. They are part of the task force to build up the body of Christ, so that the body in turn can serve. It has the goal of creating servants for service.

How is it then with so many pastors, we end up with so few capable of service? I think that pastoring is probably one of the easiest ministries to fake. The other ministries can be clearly seen for what they are by the results but people can hide in a pastorate for years without being shown as false shepherds. We shall see the clear marks of the true pastor as we study their role. The title 'pastor' is generally but not always applied to Protestant clergy, whereas the Catholic Church uses the title priest. Both terms are used of those who lead a congregation.

In order to understand the work of the 'pastor' we need to understand the nature of the pastor's analogue, that is the shepherd, since a pastor is a shepherd of God's flock. There is a mistaken notion that feeding the sheep of God means preaching at them, sermonising them but that is a welfare mentality that has crept into the churches such that the sheep are deemed to be stupid to feed themselves and a hired professional is needed to undertake that for them. Consequently there are sheep who do not feed themselves. Let me explain. Sheep are quite capable of feeding themselves. They are not hooked up to some protein shake and intravenously fed. They have teeth to grind and eyes to see the food.

Shepherds do not gather food and place it before the sheep and as is the case in nature, hungry sheep will feed themselves. If a modern day congregation is a 'flock', it just rolls up at feeding time, on Sunday, fills up and saunters off for another week. Sheep do not work like that. They eat every day and if they do not eat they will die, so it is in their own interest to feed themselves. The shepherd leads them to green pastures and still waters but the sheep eat for themselves.

I can recall meeting a member of Westminster chapel some 40 years ago. They were well schooled, fed you might say, on what Dr Lloyd Jones had given them but there were gaping holes in their diet, their knowledge. They were spoon fed, which may be alright in early development but is not something that should continue for life. They were clearly highly reliant on the ministry of another person.

I do not see that it is the duty of a pastor, of necessity, to provide weekly sermons to a Church especially not to a group of lazy sheep that just attend for spiritual food and provide nothing of value in service. We take a lesson from the Bereans, *Act 17:10 Immediately when night came, the believers sent Paul and Silas to the city of Berea. When Paul and Silas arrived in the city of Berea, they entered the synagogue. Act 17:11 The people of Berea were more open-minded than the people of Thessalonica. They were very willing to receive God's message, and every day they carefully examined the Scriptures to see if what Paul said was true. Act 17:12 Many of them became believers, and quite a number of them were prominent Greek men and women.* GW.

A pastor is primarily a moral leader setting an example to the people of God. That means not just a 'sermoniser' but a practical example of the faith. *1Pe 5:2 Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; 1Pe 5:3 Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.* A **Pastor** is a leader by example. I raise the question as to whether Pastors are even to be paid? Should we really be paying men to spend their weekdays reading and preparing a few sermons each week? Pastors should be spending their time getting to know their sheep.

I do not see that the Bible teaches that each Church of necessity has its own Pastor. It might have none or many. A Pastor might easily work among a number of Churches. It might depend upon the needs and maturity of the people. It does not say ordain Pastors in every Church, but it does say, *Act 14:23 And when they had ordained them **elders in every church**, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.* Elders may be Pastors, Shepherds, or they may be Teachers or Apostles. They are however all elders not neophytes.

It also occurs to me that the 'sheep', the flock of God do not call a **Pastor** any more than a flock of sheep call a **Shepherd**. The idea that sheep pick and choose a shepherd is alien to the concept of

pastoring. I believe that people should recognise a called pastor and be subject to his guidance. It is not about casting around for someone who suits you or your concept of 'church'. It is about recognising the gifts of God to the church. Christ's called ministers should not be divided by institutionalism or denominationalism and should be recognised by all Christians. I am not advocating ecumenism but a return to a gifted church under God. Our brother Peter is a gift to the Church not to a denomination. The consequence of not recognising God's gift is that we have a modern ministry that fails to develop individuals to the point where they are serviceable to the body of Christ.

*1Pe 5:1 I, a fellow elder, exhort the elders among you, I being also witness of the sufferings of Christ, and being sharer of the glory about to be revealed: 1Pe 5:2 **Shepherd the flock of God** among you, exercising oversight, not by compulsion, but willingly; nor eagerly for base gain, but readily; 1Pe 5:3 nor as exercising lordship over **the ones allotted to you**, but becoming examples of the flock. 1Pe 5:4 And at the appearing of the **Chief Shepherd**, you will receive the never fading crown of glory. LITV.*

Neither did Peter give up his calling to provide welfare for squabbling widows. *Act 6:2 The twelve apostles called all the disciples together and told them, "It's not right for us to give up God's word in order to distribute food. Act 6:3 So, brothers and sisters, choose seven men whom the people know are spiritually wise. We will put them in charge of this problem. Act 6:4 However, we will devote ourselves to praying and to serving in ways that are related to the word."* GW. Clearly, pastoring does not necessarily involve welfare or church administration. Biblical leadership is central to pastoring. Let us also remind ourselves that if welfare is undertaken it is primarily for the believer not the unbeliever.

What does pastoring involve? Jesus tells us. *Joh 10:11 I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. Joh 10:12 But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. Joh 10:13 The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. Joh 10:14 I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. **A shepherd watches for the safety of the sheep**, the wolves that will attack them.*

David was a shepherd and that equipped him to fight giants, *1Sa 17:33 Saul responded to David, "You can't fight this Philistine. You're just a boy, but he's been a warrior since he was your age." 1Sa 17:34 David replied to Saul, "I am a shepherd for my father's sheep. Whenever a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, 1Sa 17:35 I went after it, struck it, and rescued the sheep from its mouth. If it attacked me, I took hold of its mane, struck it, and killed it. 1Sa 17:36 I have killed lions and bears, and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them because he has challenged the army of the living God."* GW.

Shepherds, pastors, deal with the moral equivalents of bears, wolves and Philistines. They stand up to error and direct to truth. They lead the flock to safe pasture. They are gladiators for the truth. They hunt down and kill the 'wolves' they do not play with them. Perhaps a quality that they must possess above all is fearlessness.

They watch and listen to the ideas, thoughts, speeches that the 'wolves' make. A pastor must know the signs of the times because he is a watchmen for God. He must be competent in doctrine, fearless in the face of error and bold in confronting sin. He must understand the 'zeitgeist', the dominant set

of ideals and beliefs that motivate the actions of the members of a society in a particular period in time. He must know it and know how to deal with its error. *1Ch 12:32 From Issachar's descendants there were 200 leaders **who understood the times and knew what Israel should do.** Their relatives were under their command.* GW.

Considering that the 'sheep' spend far more time in the world, than as a body gathered together as a church, the odds are weighed against the pastor. He may feed them but for the most part, the flock are left to themselves to feed upon the garbage dumps of this world, the poison of error and untruth that will constantly assault the flock. The pastoral duty must be to see what else his sheep are feeding upon and warn them of the consequence. The pastor must also guard against the flock bringing the ways of the world into the Church because they have developed a taste for them.

Paul counsels the elders, the overseers (ἐπίσκοπος = episkopos = bishop) at the church at Ephesus. *Act 20:27 For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.* The pastors or shepherds must be familiar with ALL of the will of God, not just parts of it. They must in turn use this knowledge to safeguard the Church, the flock. I remember many years ago raising some issues with the 'pastor' of Yateley Strict Baptist. I can still hear him telling me that although I was 99% right, they would not do anything about it the things that were unscriptural. It was peace at all costs, peace at the expense of truth.

I believe that that 'pastor' will answer for his attitude because he had a duty to protect the Church from error. *Act 20:28 Then take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit placed you as overseers, to **shepherd the assembly** of God which He purchased through His own blood.* *Act 20:29 For I know this, that after my departure **grievous wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;*** *Act 20:30 and **out of you yourselves will rise up men speaking perverted things, in order to draw away the disciples after themselves.*** LITV.

That task of shepherding was given by Christ. I do not believe that you can take that role upon yourself without the calling from Christ because they are Christ's gifts to the Church. *Eph 4:11 And **he gave** some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;* *Eph 4:12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:*

I should not have to say this but I will. **You cannot pastor an unbeliever.** This ministry exists for the Saints and it is building the body of Christ. A pastor is only a gift to believers not unbelievers. Jesus did not send pastors out to tend to unbelievers. Neither did He set up a welfare programme, health care or education programmes for the unbeliever. He is not a goatherd, he is a shepherd.

Let me again state the reason for this. It is that the natural man receives not the things of the spirit of God. *Rom 8:7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.* *Rom 8:8 So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.* You cannot shepherd goats. The difference between sheep and goats so I am led to believe is, 'A sheep is led by its shepherd. A goatherd is led by his goats'. Goats go where they want to and the goatherd follows the goats. Peter's life is taken up with preaching the Gospel and helping the believer, the sheep.

Peter is called to his work unlike many today. Here is the sort of ‘tosh’ that is taught by denominations in order to become a ‘pastor’. This is to get accreditation from Spurgeon’s Baptist College. They say:

“If you feel called to the Baptist ministry there are several steps you need to take in the following order:

- You need to have been a member of a Baptist Church for two years.
- Discuss your plans with your own minister, or, if your Church is without a minister, talk to your Church leaders. These people can help you discern God’s will and calling. The leaders and congregation of your church will test your calling.
- Once the Ministerial Recognition Committee has accepted you, it notifies Spurgeon's College. We then invite you to attend an interview day at the College. A mixed interview panel considers whether Spurgeon’s is the right place for you to study and if you have the motivation to complete the programme. If you are married, we invite your spouse to be fully involved by coming with you.”

“If” you are married? If you are not you should not be in the pastorate shepherding God’s flock. *1Ti 3:2 An overseer, then, must be beyond criticism—the husband of one wife, clear-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach*, TLV. If you say we can make exceptions for gifted single men, I ask why not make an exception for a gifted drunk? Neither are acceptable.

On a historic note I point out that Spurgeon left the Baptist Union in 1887 but Spurgeon’s College joined the union after his death. I wonder if he would now support the College he founded? What is my point? You do not ‘feel’ you have been called and you do not need some ‘winkle picker’ to search your heart before God to know your calling. You either know it or you do not know it. Peter knew it because Christ told Him and that is the way it should still be.

The Bible makes it clear that the ‘will of God’ is central to anything that we undertake. *1Jn 5:14 And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us*: If we do not know God’s will **in general**, that is, in the scripture, we will act in ignorance of that will and it will be sin. We cannot then ask according to God’s will.

If we do not know God’s will, **in particular**, personally, we shall not know what our calling and duties are. We cannot know according to God’s will. That I think is the general state of the Churches and why people are constantly trying to invent new programmes because the old ones did not work, because they were not of God in the first place.

It is because we are intent on building man’s church in man’s way, that we neglect to observe the way that Christ said His Church should be built. That I suggest is why we have all the attractions of a fun fair to get people interested in joining the circus. We lack gifted people so we resort to recruiting ‘clowns’ who will dumb down the gospel. I seriously believe that so called modern evangelism will yield little of lasting value. It may be entertaining but it is not built on Christ. The question that we should be asking in terms of our activities is, “Are we consciously striving to please our Lord or are we doing what we do because it makes us feel good about ourselves and it pleases men?”

Peter was always bold but he is now possessed of a divine boldness. He has also transformed from a whimpering coward into a Lion. *Pro 28:1 The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion.* He is by no means perfect but he will be faithful to Christ. Peter has been learning some important lessons about his Master and how he might serve Him best. Peter has been knocked about a bit and it has changed him.

Michelangelo the great Italian sculptor said that 'every block of stone has a statue inside it and it is the task of the sculptor to discover it.'

"Michelangelo believed the sculptor was a tool of God, not creating but simply revealing the powerful figures already contained in the marble. Michelangelo's task was only to chip away the excess, to reveal. He worked often for days on end without sleep, keeping his boots and clothes on. One can clearly recognize the grooves from mallet and pointed chisel on the marble surface used in this initial stage. Unlike most sculptors, who prepared a plaster cast model and then marked up their block of marble to know where to chip, Michelangelo mostly worked free hand, starting from the front and working back. These figures emerged from the marble "as though surfacing from a pool of water".



I believe that Peter too is emerging before us, a Rock that has been carved by a Master Craftsman. *Eph 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.*

What then can we say of this dear man from the things that we have observed of him so far? He is obedient to Christ in that he submits to rebuke. He has faith, 'little faith' but that small faith is in the object of true faith, Christ Jesus. He recognises the person of Jesus as the Christ, the anointed, the Messiah and God Himself has revealed this to Peter. He is privileged to see the Old prophets Moses and Elijah and Jesus in Glory and He has heard God speak, *Luk 9:35 And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him.*

Peter's discipleship, his training is nearing completion. This is a transformation all Christians should make. They go from learning to service. He is now trusted to carry the Gospel to the Nations and that will begin appropriately at the feast of Pentecost, a feast commemorating the end of the new harvest, 50 days after the Passover. Although Peter has responsibility, it does not mean that he will now live a faultless life. He will still make mistakes as all mortals will. Peter is not a sinless man, he is however a forgiven man and there is a big difference between the two. Is it possible to be a faithful man even while fallible?

16. Peter (leading the Apostles).

I left over the answer as to how does a man become a shepherd, how did Peter become a pastor? Years ago, a dear brother, Bob Whitmarsh, now with the Lord, used to preach in the market here in Bracknell. He would put on his best suit and polish his shoes. "if they were upset", he would say, "It is not because I am dirty or my shoes unclean" and pointing at his banner, he would say, "It is that

that offends them". He carried a text on poles above his head, "The wages of sin is death". When people asked what college he went to, he would say, "St Mary's". "Where is that they would ask?" "At the feet of Jesus", he would reply.

That is exactly where Peter learned and earned his pastorate. He learned from the life of Jesus sitting at His feet, walking by His side, learning from His speech and actions. Discipleship is an 'on the job apprenticeship'. It is a real world experience, not a cloistered academic experience in a college from which you emerge to engage the world. Peter learned from what Jesus taught, what He said, how He said it, what He did and how He did it. That is what we should do. Isn't it a shame, as we have noted before, how ignorant we are of the Gospels because we love to run on and spend time in the Epistles? The Gospels are not just for children they are for adults too. They are the core teachings for disciples and pastors. With Peter, we have trodden the path of discipleship through the Gospels. The Gospels are discipleship in action.

Peter was taught by Jesus how to deal with the wolves, *Mat 7:15 Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Mat 7:16 Ye shall know them by their fruits.* Jesus spoke against these hypocrites and if we were not so influenced by the political correctness of our age, so would we. Jesus did not play with the scribes and Pharisees. He did not condone their evil ways or synthesise their ideas into the teachings of the Kingdom. Jesus did not accommodate them for the sake of peace or to be inclusive. As Vance Havner observed of our day and age, "Our Lord sent His disciples out as sheep among wolves; now the wolves are being invited into the sheepfold."

How would we measure a successful pastorate? Increase in membership of a church, successful outreach programmes, good website, large collections, youth membership, popular in the community? Let me ask you a question. If you were choosing a new fellowship, what would be top of your list? Congregation size, Church band, entertaining sermons? Or would you put the quality of the pastorate at the top of your list? Tell me and I will tell you where you are going to end up.

Peter it appears was killed for his faithfulness not for his popularity. Pastoring is not about popularity or satisfying the demands of 'the sheep' or the Church board. **Success is delivering the sheep safely to Christ.** This is what the Chief Shepherd did. *Joh 18:9 That the saying might be fulfilled, which he spake, Of them which thou gavest me have I lost none.* As Paul says, it is about presentation to Christ. *Co 11:2 For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. 2Co 11:3 But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.*

After all that he had seen, learned and done with Jesus, Peter had to conduct his pastorate from the right position and for the right reason. One thing Peter lacked at his discipleship graduation was this. "Do you love me Peter?" Ministry is not primarily about serving others, it is about serving the Lord Christ and loving Christ above all. We can only serve the saints well if we are first serving Christ well. Before we engage on anything for the Lord, any work at all, we should answer the question, "Do you love me?" It comes first and last. If we do not have a deep and abiding love for Jesus we will never love His people.

Peter takes the lead in weeks leading up to Pentecost. *Act 1:14 These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren. Act 1:15 And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty,) Act 1:16 Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus.*

It is Peter who implements the replacement of Judas Iscariot. We might ask “would it really have made any difference if they had just kept the 11 Apostles?” Would selecting another ‘official’ Apostle have added any tangible benefit to their position? Perhaps not and we do not hear of the replacement Matthias again in the history of the church, not that that is an argument that Matthias did nothing. Perhaps the point is, that Peter is directing the Christian movement from Biblical principles. Peter is being directed by the scripture just as any Christian group should be. If we do anything it should be based upon God’s directives and these Apostles and their companions start as they intend to go on. This seems not to happen much today when people gather to discuss Christian principles, it is not God’s word that leads, it is a consensus of opinion.

Something has happened to Peter. I am not saying that I think that Peter was ‘saved’ or ‘converted’ at this specific time and that enabled him to do this. God willing we shall look at these issues of conversion in another study on transformation. But something powerful had occurred to Peter to grant him a peculiar recall and understanding of the relevance of specific scriptures to his own day. I am not saying that he was totally ignorant about the scriptures up to this point but it appears that he now has an insight into scriptures and he uses them to direct his life. It is a transformation that should happen to all Christians. They grow in knowledge and their lives are increasingly directed by scripture as they grow.

In Peter’s case it seems as if his knowledge has been supernaturally enhanced to equip him in his task. I do not think that what happened is limited to that far off day only. I am reminded of Dafydd Morgan whom we have spoken about, the Welsh minister called to be a leader in the 1859 revival? How in October 1858 the preacher went to sleep one night and woke at 4 a.m. a changed man. He was imbued with an extraordinary memory for spiritual things. His preaching from that date was marked with a new power. It has been said that Morgan went to bed like a lamb and awoke as a lion.

I might also point out that he too enjoyed a remarkable ministry more in line with an apostle than an evangelist. Let me just give an example from his ministry to encourage us to pray for revival in our own day, for men like Peter and Dafydd to arise again. On the 12th June 1860 the revivalist had already visited Chapels nearby in Taffs Well in the morning and Treforgan (Morgantown) in the afternoon. He records that the evening meeting was due to take place in Horeb Chapel but it proved too small for the hundreds of people who came to listen to the preacher from West Wales. The meeting was then moved to the then larger Penuel Welsh Baptist Chapel. However, even that was too small to contain the people, and there were hundreds who remained outside in the burial ground, who had to be content with listening to the visiting preacher through the open windows.

Thomas Awstin (how Morgan writes the name) was said to be standing at the door of a tavern half a mile away from the Chapel, smoking with a group of ‘frivolous friends’, when at a particular point in the sermon, Dafydd Morgan raised his voice to a shout and repeated over and over again the phrase

'Come to the waters, come to the waters.' It was this that forcefully struck the young Austin, as he stood outside the Lewis Arms tavern, and brought about his conversion to Christ.

This is another transformation that occurs in the life of a believer. God's word becomes a controlling influence in life. The believer finds that one day the book that was closed to his mind is now opened. It becomes to him a mirror of his soul, a guide to his walk, the food to his spirit. He finds that it comes to his mind and into his conversation. He has a river of living water flowing from his belly. *Joh 7:37 In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. Joh 7:38 He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. Joh 7:39 (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)* That is a promise to all believers and it is a transformation. It is another sign of eternal life.

This is clearly seen on the day of Pentecost, *Act 2:14 But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: Act 2:15 For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. Act 2:16 But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; Act 2:17 And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams:*

Peter has become an eloquent preacher. The Spirit of God speaks through him and he understands Christianity in the context of the history of Israel. It is a remarkable transformation and it occurred in a relatively short space of time. Why do we see so little of this transformation in understanding in the lives of Christians? I think that the answer is very simple. Little personal effort is expended in studying scripture and even less effort is made in desiring to serve Christ. Christianity prefers a diet of bread and circuses.

Peter works the miracles of Jesus but that is the attracter for the crowds. At Solomon's portico, he shows his deep understanding of the Older Testament. It is hard to see the old Peter in this wise and bold man before us. *Act 3:11 And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering. Act 3:12 And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk? Act 3:13 The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go.*

The authority with which he preaches is not lost on the rulers, *Act 4:13 Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.* They are unlettered (ἀγράμματος = agrammatos) and they are ignorant, literally 'idiots' (ἰδιώτης = idiōtēs) but it was because they had been with Jesus they were changed. Weak men think that you become a great Christian by going to an institution that will supply you with 'letters' that will make you effective. This fisherman Peter became great without any formal education. His informal education was sufficient for the Gospel and what he did is within the grasp of all men.

William Tyndale's rationale for getting the Bible in the vernacular was so that people could educate themselves.

Soon, his sermons aroused the anger of the Church hierarchy, especially when he was found preaching to a crowd outside the Bristol Cathedral. They charged him with "Spreading heresy," and he was summoned before the chancellor of the diocese of Worcester (who was standing in for the Bishop at the time.) He was warned not to preach in public anymore. Even so, Tyndale continued doing this at every opportunity. One day, a priest visiting Little Sodbury openly attacked Tyndale's beliefs. He replied " If God spare my life, before very long **I shall cause a plough boy to know the scriptures better than you do!**" This was not an idle boast. Tyndale knew how he was going to put an end to the priest's evil ways. He was going to translate the Bible into English, so everyone would be able to read the Bible for themselves. Then the priests, who had probably never read it once in their life, would be for it.

You can tell when men have been with Jesus and you can tell how much time that they spend with Him. It will show in their knowledge of Him. Look at a man's bible and it will tell you how much time he spends reading it. Look at their lives and it will tell you how much time they practice what it says. Look at their companions and it will tell you where their loyalties are.

Now Peter is a commissioned officer. His commission is to baptise and disciple. *Mat 28:18 When Jesus came near, he spoke to them. He said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Mat 28:19 So wherever you go, make disciples of all nations: Baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Mat 28:20 Teach them to do everything I have commanded you. "And remember that I am always with you until the end of time."* GW.

The prime directive was to make disciples of all nations baptising them into the threefold Name. Yes, people would in the course of their ministry be converted, saved, fed and healed but the purpose was to disciple. The word mathematics comes from the Greek μάθημα (máthēma), which means "that which is learnt", "what one gets to know". A disciple is a learner and he learns about the Kingdom of God. *Mat 13:52 So Jesus said to them, "That is why every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a home owner. He brings new and old things out of his treasure chest."* John Gill comments on this scribe of the kingdom:

"which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven", as each of them be more or less; that is, understands the nature of the Gospel Church state, the discipline, laws, and rules of Christ's house, the doctrines of the Gospel, the way and things pertaining to the kingdom of heaven; as Christ and his righteousness, and the regenerating and sanctifying grace of the Spirit: such an one (*is this*).

Peter and the Apostles had a ministry to educate men about the things of the Kingdom of God. It is an education course, an indoctrination into the new way of life, the doctrines of the Gospel. Some might not like Christianity described as a process of indoctrination but that is what it is. The Merriam Webster dictionary explains indoctrination:

Indoctrinate simply means "brainwash" to many people. But its meaning isn't always so negative. When this verb first appeared in English in the 17th century, it simply meant

"to teach"-a meaning that followed logically from its Latin root. The "doc" in the middle of indoctrinate derives from the Latin verb *docēre*, which also means "to teach." Other offspring of "*docēre*" include "docent" (referring to a college professor or a museum guide), "docile," "doctor," "doctrine," and "document." It was not until the 19th century that "indoctrinate" began to see regular use in the sense of causing someone to absorb and take on certain opinions or principles.

This is what they did. *Act 14:21 Having proclaimed good news also to that city, and having disciplined many, they turned back to Lystra, and Iconium, and Antioch, Act 14:22 confirming the souls of the disciples, exhorting to remain in the faith, and that through many tribulations it behoveth us to enter into the reign of God, YLT.* They preached the Gospel and made disciples.

Is Peter infallible? The answer depends upon what you mean by 'infallible'? The answer in part lies is this. If Peter speaks in the Spirit he is infallible and hence when used by the Spirit to convey the Divine truth to us by word, he is infallible. When Peter acts in the flesh, he is as fallible as he is mortal. Even the Apostle is being sanctified. One such occasion when he is led away is in the matter of separation from the gentiles for fear of the Jews. Paul records this in the Galatians letter. Is this uncharitable of Paul, do we have to air 'dirty linen' in public? The answer is yes, if it is a public offence and definitely yes, when the action undermines the truth.

One lesson that Peter must learn is that his Jewish prejudice against the gentiles cannot be sustained in the Gospel era. Even an Apostle keeps learning, re-educating and renewing his mind. It took a vision to change his mind. He recounts to Cornelius what had happened. *Act 11:5 I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me: Act 11:6 Upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. Act 11:7 And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay and eat.*

The outcomes of this visitation was that *Act 11:7 And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay and eat. Act 11:8 But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth. Act 11:9 But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.* Peter had been shown the true meaning of 'clean and unclean' that now in the NT no longer applied. All men were acceptable in God's sight and the distinction between Jew and gentile was removed.

Now we would have hoped that this lesson had lodged firmly in Peter's mind but as you know, having learned something from an early age it is hard to dislodge it. I can recall how strange it felt to worship in a non-conformist gathering having been brought up in formal Anglicanism. Transitioning from inbuilt prejudice does not always happen overnight. It did not with Peter. Although he had grasped the general principal, there was a residual affection for the old ways.

When the controversy over the Law of Moses and its application to gentiles arose, Peter hosted a conference in Jerusalem. The outcome was, *Act 15:19 Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: Act 15:20 But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. Act 15:21 For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the*

synagogues every sabbath day. Moses still had his faithful followers so they sent out a letter, *Act 15:23 And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia: Act 15:24 Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment:*

The Galatian incident appears to arise after Peter accompanied Paul back to Antioch after the Council of Jerusalem, *Act 15:22 Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren:* What transpires is even sadder in the light of the fact that they had discussed what obligations should be placed upon Gentile Christians.

Gal 2:11 But when Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong— Gal 2:12 for before certain people came from Jacob, he regularly ate with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and separate himself, fearing those from the circumcision. Gal 2:13 And the rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy. Gal 2:14 But when I saw that they were not walking in line with the truth of the Good News, I said to Peter in front of everyone, "If you—being a Jew—live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?" TLV.

Peter had not fully understood the message he had been given at Cornelius' house. Peter had been led away from the truth by the fear of the Jewish Christians. It is a lesson that if we have the truth, we must hold it at any cost because the damage that is caused by neglect is incalculable. Peter's failure also serves to teach us that however much we admire another Saint, they have feet of clay, lest we should turn them into some object of veneration.

I do not think that the Galatian incident causes Peter and Paul to fly away from each other. Peter writes affectionately about Paul in his letters, *2Pe 3:14 Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless. 2Pe 3:15 And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as **our beloved brother Paul** also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; 2Pe 3:16 As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.*

Even Apostles have their conflicts but because they could acknowledge the truth, they remained beloved brothers. This is why I find it strange that if Paul was in Rome with Peter, there is no record of communication between them. It is here for us that we bid Peter farewell in his journey to martyrdom. He disappears from the 'Acts of the Apostles' and whatever happened becomes conjecture. What is not conjecture is the legacy of his life. From that first meeting with Jesus after a wasted night's labour fishing for nothing, he has grown in stature to cast his net around the world.

17. Peter's epitaph

We might ask the significance of the fact that Jesus did not minister for much longer on Earth and at least stay until the New Testament Church was established beyond any conflict. Why did the Master not linger to make certain sure that nothing would go wrong and that the Church triumphant would break down the gates of hell in a show of might and power? Why leave the mission to mere mortals? Jesus will of course eventually return and subdue all things, bringing this Creation to an end and it will happen in the twinkling of an eye. Until then, we have a battle to fight against Principalities and Powers. That battle is fought by the redeemed people of God and it is trusted to men like Peter (and to us) who will show Christ to the World.

We do not see that Jesus left this earth and His people to themselves however, *Joh 14:18 I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.* The only barrier to that manifestation is us and how we show Christ IN us or perhaps allow Christ to show Himself in us?

We come now to the epilogue for the life of Peter and it is contained in two short letters. Dating New Testament literature is not easy and so we have only an approximate idea when they were written. That said, the authenticity of Peter's epistles was accepted early in church history and was mentioned in other writings before the end of the first century AD. These letters are among the last written in the mid 60's of the first century AD when our dear Apostle was entering old age. We may say that they represent the final fruit, his last thoughts on his journey, his epitaph, his last will and testimony.

Book	Date (A.D.)	Book	Date (A.D.)
James	45-49	Philippians, Philemon	63
Galatians	49	1 Peter	63-64
1 & 2 Thessalonians	51	1 Timothy	63-66
Mark	50s or 60s	Titus	63-66
Matthew	50s or 60s	Hebrews	64-68
1 Corinthians	55	2 Peter	66
2 Corinthians	56	2 Timothy	67
Romans	57-58	Jude	68-80
Luke	60	John	85-90
Acts	61	1, 2, 3 John	85-90
Colossians, Ephesians	61	Revelation	90-95

Critics have tried to undermine the epistles because of linguistic and stylistic objections. They say that the epistle has a good Greek style and has been influenced by the Greek of the LXX. It is argued that Peter, a Galilean fisherman, was unable to write the letter. However, it is possible that Peter could have achieved fluency in the Greek language since it was wide spread throughout the Middle East and more than 30 years separate Peter the fisherman and Peter the writer.

Examine your own life to see how your skills developed over the last thirty years. How many changes, refinements, improvements, increase in knowledge has occurred that you scarce consider?

I take the epistles as genuine and they lay bare the shepherd's heart, his mature desires for the flock of God. They represent the things that he really values as he prepares to make his final transformation. They show the growth in knowledge and wisdom that he has gained since he first cast aside those fishing nets at the sea of Tiberias. If there were such things as Fathers in the historic church, I have no hesitation in setting him forth as such and as such, he is an example of a life lived well and a life lived for his Saviour.

You may pause to ask about the importance of these letters. Why write it down so many years after the event? Surely the doctrine is well established? Just think for a moment what would have happened if we did not have these writings and those of Paul and John and Luke. The church would

have been left with an un-established oral tradition and there would be no basis from which to establish the original Gospel story. There would be nothing to refer back to as authority. All sorts of additions would be acceptable because there would be nothing to challenge the errors and the Roman Catholic papal church would reign supreme. Peter however, wants the things that he taught to be a matter of permanent record, *2Pe 1:15 Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able **after my decease** to have these things always in remembrance.* A voice beyond the grave.

I think that these sort of letters are best written later in Peter's life. I would encourage Christians also to write later in life when the thoughts have matured and the focus is clear. It is the full harvest of a godly life, the best thoughts to leave to the next generation. Have you ever considered what message you would like to leave? What essence of your Christian life would you pass on? A warning perhaps, like William Booth the Salvationist? He predicted, "I consider that the chief dangers which confront the coming century will be religion without the Holy Ghost, Christianity without Christ, forgiveness without repentance, salvation without regeneration, politics without God, and heaven without hell." He was absolutely spot on.

General Booth foresaw¹³ the rise of a form of pseudo-Christianity, Christianity without Christ, characterized by those who are "denying the Master who bought them" *2Pe 2:1 But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even **denying the Lord that bought them**, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.* The bedrock of our message must always be the centrality of the person of Jesus Christ and that is what Peter teaches.

So what would you leave behind? A deafening silence or a call to arms? The NT Christians seem to me to be far more on fire for the Lord than Christians today. Was it because they had 'stokers' like Peter rather than men who would encourage an easy life? There were men back then who would light the fires of faith and throw fuel upon them. Not content with a small glimmer but only with a conflagration. Like Booth, Peter clearly saw the consequences for the Church if it neglected the truth.

Peter writes his letters to *1Pe 1:1to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.* I will speculate that after the council of Jerusalem (circa 49AD) Peter went to Antioch shortly after Paul, *Act 15:30 So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle:* It was here that Paul confronts Peter about separating from the Gentiles. *Gal 2:11 But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed.*



¹³ <http://ministrytodaymag.com/281-features/19934-a-sobering-warning-to-the-church>

Perhaps Peter never went back to Jerusalem but went North to preach the Gospel to the 'strangers', Jews of the dispersion to whom he now writes? This might explain the fact that he writes to recent converts, *1Pe 2:2 As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby*: One of the marks of the new birth is that there is a hunger for God's word. I do not care what a person says about his or her so called conversion experiences, if there is no appetite for the things of God, especially the Word of God, there is something wrong. Babies do not wait to be fed, they cry out to be fed. If they do not show an appetite, a desire for milk, there is something wrong with them. Peter is concerned that his 'babies' grow. That is his concern, not that they are just educated but that they mature.

When I consider this concern of Peter, it is not the same focus that Churches have today. He does not seem over concerned for buildings, choirs, orchestras, entertainment, collections, sermons, outreach, social welfare programmes and so on. These things are not primary. Peter focuses on the quality of spiritual life in the believer, that 'silent worship' from a godly Christian life from which all else proceeds. If you want to please the Lord, consider this, ***2Pe 3:18 But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.***

In both his Epistles Peter stirs up the brethren, *1Pe 2:11 Dearly beloved, I beseech (exhort) you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; 2Pe 1:13 Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; 2Pe 1:14 Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me. 2Pe 3:1 This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance*: Peter wants to keep Christians on their toes, to arouse them from that lethargy that so easily overtakes them and the consequent error.

We may know the truth, or think we do, but we need constantly reminding of it because our sinful nature, the flesh, the old man will relegate it to the background. Like a book once read, put in the old bookcase in the spare room. *2Pe 1:12 Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth*. Peter shows that there is no room for complacency.

Peter knew that the Gospel would be undermined by 'junk science'. Uniformitarianism (the theory that changes in the earth's crust during geological history have resulted from the action of continuous and uniform processes) is wrong. *2Pe 3:3 Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, 2Pe 3:4 And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. 2Pe 3:5 For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: 2Pe 3:6 Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished*:

Men would, in Peter's future, deliberately deny the truth about the Creation and the Flood, they would maintain a wilful ignorance of God's word. Yet judgement would come as a thief in the night, *2Pe 3:10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. 2Pe 3:11 Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, 2Pe 3:12 Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved,*

and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? 2Pe 3:13 Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

Judgement is one thread of Peter's message to the future generations. Another is the need to maintain order within the church. The issue of 'subjection', unpopular in our own day and age, was central to his message. We have to be put in mind of this because it is something that we dislike. We want the benefits of Christ's atonement but we do not want to be subject to Him. Men want a relationship with God but not on God's terms. We do not like being told what we should do, we do not submit ourselves voluntarily to authority (perhaps one reason that many pastors struggle).

- *1Pe 2:13 **Submit** yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; 1Pe 2:14 Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well.*
- *1Pe 2:18 **Servants, be subject to your masters** with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward. 1Pe 2:19 For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully.*
- *1Pe 3:1 Likewise, ye **wives, be in subjection to your own husbands**; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives;*
- *1Pe 3:5 For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, **being in subjection unto their own husbands**:*
- *1Pe 3:7 Likewise, ye **husbands**, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.*
- *1Pe 3:22 Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; **angels and authorities and powers being made subject** unto him.*
- *1Pe 5:5 Likewise, ye **younger, submit yourselves unto the elder**. Yea, **all of you be subject one to another**, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.*

The word Peter uses for 'be subject' (ὑποτάσσω = hupotassō) is a Greek military term meaning "to arrange [troop divisions] in a military fashion under the command of a leader". In non-military use, it was "a voluntary attitude of giving in, cooperating, assuming responsibility, and carrying a burden". Peter was concerned that the Divine order was upheld in the Church. From the young to the old, "be subject". Now let me explain briefly by one example, what I think that Peter means. *1Pe 3:1 Likewise, ye wives, **be in subjection to your own husbands**; that, if any obey not (do not believe) the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives;*

This is not the drudges' charter, the call to oppression, servitude and slavery, the emphasis and acceptance of unjust male dominance. It is not clear whether Peter has in mind 'the wife' in relation to an unbelieving husband or a believing husband but what is said applies to both. How you say, can a woman be subject to a brute of an unbeliever or a legalistic Christian man? Why do they deserve any respect or obedience at all? First let me say that Christ never encouraged rebellion or the forceful and lawless overthrow of wicked regimes, or a witch hunt for evil men. These things are all in hand and God will in His good time deal with evil. Vengeance is His.

There is a scene in the war series 'Band of Brothers', during post-surrender occupation of Germany, where the former training officer Captain Sobel comes into contact with a former trainee who is now promoted above him and out ranks him as a Major. Sobel tries to walk past the Major, Richard Winters without saluting him. Winters calls to Sobel saying, "You salute the rank, not the man". Grudgingly, Sobel then salutes Major Winters. It is not a question of whether you like the person, agree with them or have problems with them, order must be observed and subjection shown. We salute those in authority because they in turn shall answer. We are to recognise and accept the order, even if it is imperfect.

Whatever the state of the husband is, the wife acknowledges 'the rank'. Behind that person stands Christ, the head and that is who you look to. *Eph 5:22 Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.* But he is nothing like the Lord you say. That is not the point. He will answer for not behaving like the Lord. Do not make the mistake of dishonouring your own rank by dishonouring his.

I would also suggest that if the husband is an unbeliever, he is unlikely to understand the demands of Christ without having the word of God presented to him. He must be preached to. Can you imagine Paul on Mars Hill trying to win the Greeks to Christ, without using God's word, just by his conduct? I think not. Godly conduct does have an effect when it stands in opposition to godless conduct and that is what I think Peter is talking about.

In fact I would say that this verse is more towards the husband than the wife. It is to that pathetic, disobedient, travesty of masculinity posing as a husband. If the wife has to 'win', that is 'gain' the husband by her good conduct, it also says a lot about the weak conduct of the husband. He should be leading by example but he is not. I have seen very few men do this and I have seen many marriage failures and the consequent marriage break ups that are a result of this failure. Peter sees the necessity of this and so he exhorts us. We can only be truly in subjection to each other if we are in subjection to Christ.

There is something else that I will suggest accompanies the concept of 'subjection' and it is this. Subjection comes with 'protection', 'nurture' and 'care' for the one in subjection. If you are in subjection to your husband, you have as a consequence the response of his care for you. Those to whom we show respectful subjection become our carers.

Christianity is and should be a caring society (I mean among Christians). *1Pe 5:5 Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be **subject one to another**, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. 1Pe 5:6 Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: 1Pe 5:7 Casting all your care upon him; for **he careth for you**.* Peter has accomplished another transformation. He cares for the order and welfare of the Church, the people of God. Religion is so often a selfish affair about our personal faith, forms of practice but not about others. For Peter it is about shepherding believers to glory.

Have you ever thought about where the 'do-gooders' of this world want you to end up, where they will shepherd you to? Where the politicians with all their rhetoric about social care, medical services and ideas lead you? Where will the godless social reformers, who want to improve your quality of life, your length of life, the health of your life, ultimately leave you? **They will leave you at the**

graveyard. They may try and stave off that inevitability and in the process create an overpopulated world of aged people but that is as far as they can take you. The graveyard.

We go to the polls next month in the UK (10th June 2017). Think what you are voting for and think what you are being offered in return for your vote. Politicians have nothing of eternal value to give you. They do not believe in the hell that you will assuredly go to if you follow their godless lives. They do not see you as a creature whose greatest need is to be forgiven, redeemed and restored for a life everlasting with your Creator. **Peter does, 1Pe 5:10** *But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.*

Peter is concerned about the quality of God's people (it is never about quantity), *2Pe 3:11 Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness.*

At the end of his life he was doing what he did when he was commissioned. A faithful servant. Peter has passed through a turbulent time in history. Old Empires are falling and New Empires are rising and in his homeland the destruction of the Nation of the Jews is at hand and Peter's departure is at hand. Did he end up in Rome? Does it matter?

I have grown to love this dear man more than ever as we have so briefly studied his life. He is sometimes a slow learner but he is one of those souls who when he has learned, learns well. He has undertaken his work and completed it well. He is a good and faithful servant, steering the Church through the shallow waters of conflict out into the wider ocean of the World. It would have taken little to have completely shipwrecked the whole venture but he did not.

What would I write as an epitaph for Simon Peter?

'Simon Peter, a faithful servant and an Apostle of Jesus Christ'

Finally, he never forgot to love *1Pe 5:14 Greet each other with a kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ.* The expression of love (φιληματι αγαπης), what does that mean? Hug, handshake, wet kiss? I leave that to you to sort out in your own mind but I suggest that you might reflect upon how you will greet Jesus in glory? How did Mary greet Jesus when she wiped His feet with her hair and wept tears upon them? Will you greet Jesus like that, like a beloved, or will you give Him a cold hand. If Christ is in each of His people, should we not greet them with the same love?

I think I know how Peter will greet Jesus.

18. Spiritual unity

The subject that I now encourage us to consider is that operation of the Spirit called the 'Baptism with the Holy Spirit'. I am inserting this study here because it was something that occurred along Peter's path of transformation. It was a seminal event, scripturally based, clearly defined and with a definite purpose. My question is, "Can all believers expect exactly the same things to happen to them that occurred to the Apostles on the day of Pentecost?"

This has been a subject of great controversy over recent history with the rise of neo-Pentecostalism. I can recall occasions when some people only accepted a person as a believer, when they had undergone an experience called 'Baptism with the Spirit'. The general expectation was (back in the 1970's) that a spiritual experience would occur that would cause an individual to speak in 'tongues'. This gave many believers a sense of being a second class Christian. If they had not been elevated to this higher level of experience, then they were spiritually inferior.

Speaking in 'tongues' was considered as "**the initial evidence**" of the Baptism with the Holy Spirit. Whether you retained the ability to speak in tongues was not necessarily important but the initial evidence was speaking in tongues. 'Tongues' (γλῶσσα = glōssa) means 'languages'. You will notice that the KJV inserts the word 'unknown' into the text, *1Co 14:4 He that speaketh in an **unknown** tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church.* It is quite clear that on the day of Pentecost, there was nothing 'unknown' about the tongues, *Act 2:7 And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? Act 2:8 And how hear we every man in **our own tongue, wherein we were born?***

The language may not be known to the speaker but they were none-the-less languages, that is, they would have had vocabulary, syntax, and grammar. We may question just what the benefit to an individual would be in 'babbling' in a language that they did not understand? In some personal way, it 'edifies' the individual (1 Co 14:4) and unless you had that experience it would be hard to say what it was like but we shall look at this later.

I am not trying to undermine the manifestation of the Spirit, spiritual gifts, but it is clear that they are distributed and that not everyone has the same gift. *1Co 12:29 Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? 1Co 12:30 Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?* However, that would not negate a single experience of 'tongues' if it were associated with a particular experience such as 'the baptism with the Spirit'. That is what we shall explore. Is 'tongues' an experience that every Christian should have?

One of the transformations that should occur in our lives is that we should become 'spiritual' people. What does it mean to be spiritual? Does it mean to be endowed with spiritual gifts, spiritual experiences, speaking in tongues? Spirituality is a state of being in contrast to our basic nature. *Rom 15:27 It hath pleased them verily; and their debtors they are. For **if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things.*** It is the new nature, the spiritual nature in contrast to the flesh, our sinful, carnal nature that characterises our immature Christianity, *1Co 3:1 And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.*

Carnality has no place in God's Kingdom. *Gal 5:19 Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Gal 5:20 Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Gal 5:21 Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.*

A mark of that spiritual maturity is that the person acknowledges the words of scripture are the commands of God. *1Co 14:37 If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.* A person's

attitude to the Bible is an indicator of spirituality. People who cast the word aside, disobey it, annul it, can make no claim to be spiritual, they are carnal, they are the natural man. Why should it be 'spiritual' to acknowledge the word of God? It is because one of the works of the Holy Spirit is to reveal God's word, Joh 14:26 But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send *in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.*

An obedient Christian is a spiritual person, even if they do not have a spiritual gift. I will use the words of Paul to summarise what we have said so far. *1Co 2:12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. 1Co 2:13 Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. 1Co 2:14 But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. 1Co 2:15 But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. 1Co 2:16 For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.*

The Spirit of God brings unity, *Eph 4:2 With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Eph 4:3 Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Eph 4:4 There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; Please mark verse 3 in your Bibles.* It is not given to you and me to create the unity of the Spirit, to create some unity movement between Christians and Churches. It is not for you and me to create unity as if there was none. "**Keep the unity**" it says. That unity exists because it is a work of the Spirit that brings us into one body, *1Co 12:13 For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.* It is our duty to guard that essential unity that God has created, not to create it. Let me give you my translation of Ephesians 4:3. "**Be swift to guard the oneness of the Spirit until we are all tied together in Peace**".

I will also digress to say that since true marriage is to be a reflection of the relationship between Christ and the Church, (Eph 5:32) and since it has a unity created by God, *Mar 10:9 What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder,* marriage starts with an essential unity. People join together because they want to be together, to be united. Marriages fail because the initial unity of spirit is not maintained, guarded, nurtured and the ties of peace maintained. That will generally happen to Christians when Christ is moved out of the relationship, and as in the Church so in the home.

It is a sad fact that whereas the Holy Spirit came to unite believers, we see the effects of the Corinthian spiritual manifestations leading to disunity. The epistle to the Corinthians opens a window into a gifted Church that is rent by factions, disorder, selfishness, sin, carelessness and overblown personalities. This is a real church for all ages, not just a past phenomenon.

If you read the Corinthian letters, you will find that this 'spiritual superiority' is at the heart of Paul's message and that it is something that he addresses. It showed itself in divisions, the disorderly and careless manner that they behaved towards each other, 'puffed up' as Paul says. Unedifying disorder in worship was shown in the failure to cover the hair (acknowledge angels), in the drunkenness at the Lord's table, in the loveless use of Spiritual gifts, in the failure to tackle sin in the church, in

fornication, in failure to respect conscience, in failure to edify each other, in compromise with sin, in litigiousness and conflict. Edification was not a word in their vocabulary. Gifts divided rather than unite and build. They had somehow missed the point about unity and oneness.

I have seen the behaviour of the Corinthian Church many times in my life and I have seen all of their sins in the modern church. Yet it pleased God to give them gifts but it was an exhibition of self, to the neglect of the greater good for God's people. Gifts were not used to build people up. *1Co 10:23 Someone may say, "I'm allowed to do anything," but not everything is helpful. I'm allowed to do anything, but not everything encourages growth. 1Co 10:24 People should be concerned about others and not just about themselves.* GW. In the push for a spiritual experience, and I refer to what people called the 'Baptism with the Spirit', I never heard in my days that anyone wanted that experience or was encouraged to seek it, because it would encourage other Christians and build them up. It was all about self and individual gratification.

It may be that we see few gifts in the Churches today because we 'ask amiss to consume them on our own lusts' as James says. We do not seek spiritual manifestations because we want to use them for the greater good of God's people. We too do not exercise that loving care for the people of God, just like the Corinthians. It is for this reason that after describing the gifts of the Spirit Paul describes how those gifts should be used. *1Co 13:1 I may speak in the languages of humans and of angels. But if I don't have love, I am a loud gong or a clashing cymbal. 1Co 13:2 I may have the gift to speak what God has revealed, and I may understand all mysteries and have all knowledge. I may even have enough faith to move mountains. But if I don't have love, I am nothing.* GW.

Loveless Christianity makes it of little effect. I have often wondered why people bothered to welcome me when I attended a 'church' meeting on Sunday. A disparate group of people appear to unite around a few hymns, a prayer and a sermon and then rush off home. Where is the fellowship in that? Where is the opportunity to encourage and build up others, through the gift that God has given us?

We see in Corinth the rise of denominations (divisions), *1Co 1:10 Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. 1Co 1:11 For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. 1Co 1:12 Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ.*

Christians who should be fighting Principalities and Powers often spend more time fighting among themselves. This is not of Christ. Two great men of faith, George Whitfield and John Wesley held opposing views on the great doctrines of election and predestination but as brothers, they endeavoured to remain united and not use their differences to split believers¹⁴

Far more united the antagonists than ever separated them. Whitefield was a moderate Calvinist; he did not let the doctrine of predestination hinder him from offering grace to all, or from insisting on the need for holiness in believers. John Wesley allowed (for a time) that some souls might be elected to eternal life. When not overheated, both men

¹⁴ <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-38/wesley-vs-whitefield.html>

saw such issues as non-essentials. At the height of the controversy, Whitefield quoted the reformer John Bradford: "Let a man go to the grammar school of faith and repentance, before he goes to the University Election and Predestination."

No merger of the two camps occurred, but there was at least reconciliation between the leaders. This "closer union in affection" continued with hiccups, but no serious interruption, up to Whitefield's death. In 1755, Charles Wesley could write happily, "Come on, my Whitefield! (since the strife is past) / And friends at first are friends again at last."

The relationship was described by one of Wesley's preachers as "agreement to differ." Whitefield was welcomed to preach among Wesley's societies. Wesley lent Whitefield one of his best preachers, Joseph Cownley, for work at the Tabernacle. Whitefield refused to build Calvinistic Chapels in places that already had a Wesleyan society. Wesley agreed to the reverse. More than once Whitefield acted as mediator when the Wesley brothers fell out, notably when Charles sabotaged John's marriage prospects to Grace Murray.

I remember to my eternal shame an occasion, as a young Christian, where I went with a group of Christians to a Bible study, with the sole intention of causing contention by forcing our own view of scripture. There was no thought given to how we might understand our brethren, encourage them, edify them, love them, it was about exalting ourselves and puffing up ourselves. How could we treat Jesus' children in such a cruel way? I have repented often of that but it is something that I have seen many times. People do not contend to establish the truth, rather to establish themselves.

I say all of this because we must understand that any true work of the Holy Spirit brings, should bring with it the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Love is the condiment, the flavour that enhances our gifts. *1Co 13:4 Love is patient. Love is kind. Love isn't jealous. It doesn't sing its own praises. It isn't arrogant. 1Co 13:5 It isn't rude. It doesn't think about itself. It isn't irritable. It doesn't keep track of wrongs. 1Co 13:6 It isn't happy when injustice is done, but it is happy with the truth. 1Co 13:7 Love never stops being patient, never stops believing, never stops hoping, never gives up.* GW.

I remember wondering, back in the 1970's, how it was that so many of those who claimed a spiritual experience did not show any advancement or improvements in other areas of their lives. Those 'Baptised with the Spirit' people did not always show a life consistent with a Holy Spirit experience. I also never saw much 'power' in those lives for all their talk of Holy Spirit Baptism.

They would try to associate their experience with the day of Pentecost but it lacked a vital element. There was a lack of power to witness of Christ. *Act 1:5 For John truly baptized with water; but **ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.** Act 1:6 When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? Act 1:7 And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. Act 1:8 But **ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you:** and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.* Verse 8 will prove critical to our exegesis.

This is how one group suggest you receive The Baptism with The Holy Spirit¹⁵:

You only have to do two things. **First**, once you have accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Saviour you just have to ask God to baptize you in the Holy Spirit. The Bible says, "Ask, and it shall be given to you" (Luke 11:9). **Second**, believe you have in fact received this gift from God. The apostle Paul, writing to the Galatians, said, "Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by hearing with faith?" (Galatians 3:2). The answer, obviously, is faith. You have to believe that if you ask, you will receive.

Pray this prayer if you sincerely desire to receive the Baptism with God's Holy Spirit:

"Heavenly Father, at this moment I come to You. I thank You that Jesus saved me. I pray that the Holy Spirit might come upon me. Lord Jesus, baptize me now in the Holy Spirit. I receive the Baptism with the Holy Spirit right now by faith in Your Word. May the anointing, the glory, and the power of God come upon me and into my life right now. May I be empowered for service from this day forward. Thank You, Lord Jesus, for baptizing me in Your Holy Spirit. Amen."

Now, having asked and received, begin to practice the power of the Spirit. An ideal place to begin is where the first apostles did, praising God in a new language. To do this, begin praising God out loud in whatever words come to you. Tell Him how much you love Him. Thank Him, worship Him, and yield your voice to Him. Now let Him give you new words of praise you never heard before. Praise Him with those words, too. You'll find that this can be a very rewarding experience of communication with God that will build up your faith. Continue to pray to God each day in the language that the Holy Spirit has given you.

It is a fine prayer and no doubt well intentioned but does it reflect anything that we are taught about the Spirit in the NT. *Luk 11:13 If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father **give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?*** I do not see that we are encouraged to pray for the 'Baptism with the Spirit' but here is a verse that clearly encourages us to ask our Father for good things and among that is the gift of the Holy Spirit. Am I just being pedantic or are we dealing with different manifestations?

Does this 'gift' refer to the Spirit in regeneration (new birth), in the power to witness Jesus, in the gifts of the Spirit or Baptism with the Spirit? This Paternal gift does not appear to have any boundaries. It is accomplished as a Sovereign act beyond man's control. In a sense it is like the 'new birth'. The Spirit goes where He will, when He will and how He will. His purpose is to reveal Christ in us, teach Christ in us and cause us to remember the things of Christ. It is not about experience for experience sake. It is all about glorifying Jesus not ourselves. As for praying out loud in whatever words come to you, it is not an instruction that I find in scripture. It is rather a case of manufacturing an experience based upon someone else's experience.

We are encouraged to pray for the Spirit but not specifically for the 'Baptism with the Spirit' although we would have to understand what we were doing that for, if we did ask. When we seek a

¹⁵ <http://www1.cbn.com/spirituallife/what-is-baptism-in-the-holy-spirit>

gift from our Father, we should be asking “Why do I want this gift?” Is it to glorify God in service or to glorify me in its usage or because it seems to be the thing to do?

The Spirit of God brings life. *Joh 6:62 What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before? Joh 6:63 It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.* It is seen in the creation of man. *Gen 2:7 And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.* I suggest that this is typical of the life that God’s Spirit brings. ***Joh 20:22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost:***

Above all else, the Spirit brings Christ into our lives and that in turn develops the fruit of the Spirit. *Joh 14:26 But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.* The Spirit brings life, the new birth and the new man, *Joh 6:63 It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.*

There was a phrase which I regard as inappropriate, that was used of the so called ‘Toronto blessing’. It was ‘slain in the Spirit’. It is not found in the Bible and no Scriptures specifically describe this Toronto experience which occurs in some church services, where believers are prayed for and in the process fall to the floor and remain unconscious for a time. To the contrary we should see not ‘slain’ but rather brought to ‘life’ in the Spirit.

Since the operations of the Holy Spirit are so wide, I admit that I cannot deal with them adequately or do them justice in a single ministry and since I do not want to divert too much from our current theme of ‘transformation’, I will attempt a very brief overview. I want us particularly to try and understand the idea of the ‘Baptism with the Spirit’¹⁶ particularly as it affected the NT Church, which differs from the Old Testament Church (Israel) because of this very manifestation. I would however encourage you to make your own personal study on the Holy Spirit and note that He is a person of the Godhead and not an impersonal force or power as some modern heretics hold.

I am also very aware that it is verging on blasphemy to try and apply our ignorant minds and limited capabilities to even begin to understand the infinite Spirit of God. That said we have been given the scriptures for our guidance and edification. In order to identify the nature of the ‘Baptism with the Spirit’ we need to separate this from the other several activities of the Holy Spirit.

We must develop a balanced view of the work of the Holy Spirit and not over emphasise one aspect at the expense of another. While it is our intention to identify what is meant by the Baptism with the Holy Spirit, we cannot neglect His work in redemption, the conviction of sin, the new birth, the revelation of Jesus Christ and so on. They are all equally important.

19. Spiritual transformations

I remind us that our present undertaking is to try and understand what the ‘Baptism with the Holy Spirit’ is and, if any, what the accompanying experiences are. To do this, I am using a process of elimination. If we examine the various aspects of the person and work of the Holy Spirit, we should be able to come to an understanding of exactly what the ‘Baptism with the Spirit’ is and what it is

¹⁶ I recommend reading Frederick Dale Bruner “Theology of the Holy Spirit”.

not. We considered last time that the great manifestations of God's Spirit are to bring unity among God's people, equip us to build up one another and to bring Christ into our lives.

In caring for one another we must take care that we look after ourselves. When I was preparing this study, it occurred to me how little people cared to invest in their personal spiritual lives. They will spend more on a pair of shoes than a good bible. It seems that people consider that it is sufficient to attend a ministry and that as a result of that they will, without any personal effort, grow. It is easy believism, entertainment, ritual because, they think, since we are saved we have nothing to do but attend a weekly service. Where is the Spirit in that?

We have outsourced our devotions. We have elevated ministers above their calling and created a dependency culture that relies on others and encourages others to do what we should do ourselves. We have become everlasting babies, unfit for service. Contrast this with the OT view of the Gospel age as one of mighty men, *Zec 12:8 In that day shall the LORD defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and he that is feeble among them at that day shall be as David; and the house of David shall be as God, as the angel of the LORD before them.* If the feeble are like David, the mighty king, where are they and where are we?

You will note that people who watch tennis matches, football matches or any other sport, do not become good players by just watching, by being a spectator. You do not become good at sport by some process of osmosis, some transfer of ideas, you have to engage in the sport, to train, play and workout. There are those who think that they can lose weight, get healthy, eat themselves well, sitting in an armchair watching TV. They buy all sorts of useless health gadgets which they never use, all the while dreaming of getting a svelte, healthy body. There are electrical muscle simulators that people strap on and they do not have to even move themselves, yet they do not appear to work¹⁷. Anything to avoid real effort but people have to work out to get fit and that is a continuous process.

This is why I dislike the term 'Christian'. I find that I cannot agree with or even associate my beliefs with many who call themselves 'Christians'. It is not a word that God first used to describe people, it was given by men and applied to disciples. Today religious people call themselves Christians but are far from disciples. They show little or no interest in Christ between meetings. It is no surprise then, that so called Christians today are incapable of defending the faith against modern day heretics, because they are doctrinal ignoramuses. What is worse, most do not even care about it enough to do anything. More to the point, why does this happen? I suggest it is because the Holy Spirit is not working in their lives. They are not driven by the Spirit.

The Apostle Jude has a warning for us. *Jud 1:19 These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit. Jud 1:20 But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, Jud 1:21 Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.* Build yourselves up. The excellent Dr Gill puts it nicely,

.....it becomes the saints to build up one another upon this; the doctrine of faith, is a foundation to build upon, particularly what regards the person, offices, and grace of Christ, and is itself of an edifying nature; and they should not content themselves with

¹⁷ <http://www.medicinenet.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=20437> "While an EMS device may be able to temporarily strengthen, tone or firm a muscle, no EMS devices have been cleared at this time (by FDA) for weight loss, girth reduction, or for obtaining "rock hard" abs".

their present knowledge of it, but seek for an improvement in it; and though they were passive when first built on Christ and his doctrines, **and though ministers are greatly instruments in building of them up more and more; yet they are capable of building up themselves, and one another, by attending on the ministry of the word**, and by private conversation, with each other, and particularly by:

praying in the Holy Ghost; which is a special means of increase and establishment in the doctrine of faith; the Holy Ghost is the author and enditer (one who dictates) of prayer, and an assister in it; without Him saints cannot call God their Father, nor pray with faith and fervency, or with freedom and liberty.....

Gifts of the Spirit are not a substitute for personal effort. Let me explain what I mean. If a person is to teach, they must have a knowledge base from which to teach and that requires some basic application to study of the Word. I do not see that the gift of teaching comes with a free download of a knowledge base. Does a man become Holy without spiritual exercise? *Heb 12:14 Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord*: No, it requires considerable effort.

Turning to the OT we see that those saints invested time in their relationship with Jehovah and it is quite clear that the Holy Spirit was present in the OT in various measures. In Creation, in the lives of the Patriarchs, in the lives of the Prophets and many ordinary saints in Israel. Here is an example, *Num 11:24 And Moses went out, and told the people the words of the LORD, and gathered the seventy men of the elders of the people, and set them round about the tabernacle. Num 11:25 And the LORD came down in a cloud, and spake unto him, and **took of the spirit that was upon him, and gave it unto the seventy elders**: and it came to pass, that, **when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied**, and did not cease. Num 11:26 But there remained two of the men in the camp, the name of the one was Eldad, and the name of the other Medad: **and the spirit rested upon them**; and they were of them that were written, but went not out unto the tabernacle: and they prophesied in the camp. Num 11:27 And there ran a young man, and told Moses, and said, Eldad and Medad do prophesy in the camp. Num 11:28 And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of Moses, one of his young men, answered and said, My lord Moses, forbid them. Num 11:29 And Moses said unto him, **Enviest thou for my sake? would God that all the LORD'S people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit upon them!***

These scriptures show a type of Pentecost in the OT when God's Spirit came upon the newly chosen elders at the Tabernacle and two who were not present with them. These two persons are 'the exception that proves the rule', that God the Spirit is not held down to time and place by men. Further, as it was Moses desire, so should it be ours that all God's people should have the Spirit upon them and prophesy. It is unfortunate that so many Christians would deny that experience to others and label it as neo-Pentecostalism. The consequence for us is a Church without much spirit.

The question for the OT is, "was the Spirit of God an abiding presence or a temporary presence?" For men like Abraham, Joseph, Saul and Samson and the Judges, King David and a host of others the Spirit of God was in their lives but often He was a temporary presence as far as His power was shown. Yet there must have been a permanent presence in the heart of the regenerate man for him to have maintained his relationship with God, to be convicted of sin and to seek reconciliation through sacrifice, sanctification and to serve his Lord in righteousness. David sums up this idea

beautifully, *Psa 51:9 Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Psa 51:10 Create in me a clean heart, O God; and **renew a right spirit within me.** Psa 51:11 Cast me not away from thy presence; and **take not thy holy spirit from me.** Psa 51:12 Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and **uphold me with thy free spirit.***

There are I suggest essential activities that should occur in the life of the believer and they are all generated by the Holy Spirit. They are all transformations that must occur and be known to occur. They are not theoretical truths, they are experimental truths, experiential, knowable in our lives and if we do not know them we cannot be in a relationship with Christ Jesus. Let us look at these truths.

There is the work of the Spirit in redemption to bring life and sight to a person in the darkness of sin. *Joh 3:5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water **and of the Spirit**, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. Joh 3:6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is **born of the Spirit is spirit.*** We, the dead, could not raise ourselves or give birth to ourselves, it was a work of grace by the Spirit. It is a truth well established in the OT and Jesus rebukes Nicodemus for not knowing this fact.

The Spirit brings to light our state of sin and the death it brings with it. Those bitten by the serpent must know they are bitten and must look somewhere for a cure or perish. Jesus gives the analogue of the serpent of Moses that saved the children of Israel. The onus was on them to seek the cure. *Joh 3:14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: Joh 3:15 That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.* If you do not feel the serpents bite, the pain of sin, you will never look to Christ.

The Spirit brings forgiveness and redemption through Christ alone. *Joh 3:18 He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.* These are transitions in the life of every believer by the Holy Spirit. I once was blind but now I see, I was dead and now I live. **None of these are called ‘the baptism with the Holy Spirit’ yet they are works of the Spirit.**

It was necessary under that first Covenant that men be ‘born again’. Jesus made this quite clear to Nicodemus speaking to him in the OT. It was impossible to see the Kingdom of God without a new birth by the Spirit of God. When the scripture records that men like Abraham looked for this City of God, he could only have done so with a regenerate heart. The things that the Prophets foresaw of Christ were through regenerate eyes. David foresaw Christ and Abraham rejoiced to see His day. *Act 2:25 For David speaketh concerning him (Christ), I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: Joh 8:56 Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.* The work of God the Spirit was known in the OT. **This is not brought about by the ‘Baptism with the Holy Ghost’, it is a separate work.**

Another work of the Spirit is sanctification. *2Th 2:13 And we--we ought to give thanks to God always for you, brethren, beloved by the Lord, that God did choose you from the beginning to salvation, in sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth, 1Pe 1:2 according to a foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, to obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied! YLT.*

Sanctification is The Holy Spirit's works in us to produce Holiness and it is for this reason we can be called Saints. It is the changes necessary to bring us into the presence of the Father. It is the removal of our old man and the putting on of the new man, something we must desire to do. It is the severance from our old life and all of its sinful associations and unequal yokes. It is a progressive work. Sanctification, holiness is not a gift it is a relationship like marriage. *Eph 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; Eph 5:26 That **he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.*** Sanctification is like the marriage relationship and evolves out of mutual love. *1Th 5:23 And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is not brought about by the 'Baptism with the Holy Ghost' it is a separate work.*

Then we have what I shall call Spiritual endowments, gifts from the Spirit to the people of God to bless and build them up, to edify them, one among the other. The word Charisma (χάρισμα hence charismatic gifts) are as the word suggests gifts of Divine grace. The Greek word for grace is charis (χάρις). The Holy Spirit graces our lives with supernatural gifts.

Peter Masters of the Metropolitan Tabernacle has published a pamphlet titled, "Proving Charismatic gifts have ceased". He says¹⁸ "The first proof for the ending of revelatory and sign gifts is that healings and wonders could only be done by Apostles and were special authenticating signs". We must encourage Dr Masters to read his Bible more thoroughly. Note these scripture. *Act 6:8 And **Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.*** Stephen was a deacon NOT Apostle. Ananias a disciple also heals Paul, *Act 9:17 And **Ananias** went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, **that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.*** Masters you are plain wrong.

Now we must ask a question with respect to comments by men like Masters. Why would they not want us to have the gifts? What would Moses have said to Masters? If the gifts confer a benefit to the Church why would they want them removed? Is it so that these little evangelical Popes can lord it over the people of God? So that the only bread comes from their hand (clearly not the Spirit's). These evangelical Popes do as much damage to the faith as the Bishop of Rome. If ever there was a need for these gifts it is now. Why do people want rid of the gifts? These gifts confer a spiritual advantage to the Body of Christ if we use them correctly. *1Co 12:7 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. 1Co 12:8 For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; 1Co 12:9 To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit;* I find nothing in scripture to lead me to believe that these gifts have passed away but I note that they are gifts not rights.

These gifts as we have seen are for edification, the building up of the body of Christ. It should be quite obvious to us but I will state it anyway, that these are gifts of the Spirit and that they should operate under the Spirit. They are **not** something that is given to us by the Spirit that we subsequently should use in our own manner, although they are subject to us. They should be governed by the Spirit. We should not isolate the Spirit from His gifts. I would not like to think for a

¹⁸ P4. Not since Apostles. 'Proving Charismatic gifts have ceased'. P Masters.

moment that something that God had given me, was being used in a godless manner or ignorantly without the approval of the Spirit.

We should perhaps distinguish at this point between gifts of the spirit and natural ability. I do not think that we can say that our natural endowments fall into the class of spiritual gifts, in the sense of the words in 1 Corinthians chapter 12. Natural abilities may arise as a result of particular genetic inheritance, brain development, social upbringing, education, opportunity, epi-genetics and so forth. They arise from our natural development in a sinful world and there is nothing 'charismatic' about them. They are not spiritual they are carnal. 'Charismata' differ from the natural gifts in that they are Holy gifts, Gifts of the Holy Spirit, sanctified Gifts, Gifts to the believer, the body of Christ, gifts to build up the believer, to edify him, to profit all and to glorify God.

Natural men have natural abilities but do not have the Spirit of God because they do not receive the things of the Spirit of God. We may of course consecrate our natural endowments to the service of God when we are converted and I think that we should. After all we brought nothing in to this world and we shall take nothing out and in the 'in between', we should serve our Creator with all our might. We should use these natural endowments to bless the people of God, for example a man who is a good steward may be able to bless God's poor. However, I do not think for a moment that we should confuse the natural with the spiritual or make them equivalent to each other.

You can of course help me in this life with your natural endowments but how do you edify me? It is a fair question. Let me ask "if we did not possess any spiritual gifts, would that absolve us from edification?" Would it mean that I could not edify you if I did not have a charismatic gift? I think that the answer is plainly, no. My duty to edify you is not predicated on me having a charismatic gift. Let me illustrate. Do I need to possess the gift of 'giving' to be able to give to anyone? Do I need the gift of 'exhortation' (παρακαλέω = parakaleō) in order to exhort, encourage or comfort you? Do I need the gift of 'mercy' to be able to show mercy? The answer in each case is that I do not need a miraculous gift to do these things. I do need a miraculous gift to heal, to interpret tongues or to work wonders. There are clearly many things that we can do to build up the saints from those good graces that we have in Christ. The question that challenges us is, do we want to? Do we want to edify the people of God or is it not important enough?

As I pondered these things I wondered whether the spiritual gifts, or at least some of them were given to 'immature' Christians to kick start fellowship and edification in the early Church. In a time before the doctrines and structures were established, before the leadership has developed, perhaps the Lord gave additional assistance, to as it were, shore up the Church, just as you would put a stake in the ground to support a sapling. It is not required with the mature tree. I am not suggesting that this is a reason for gifts ceasing, to the contrary they are very important in establishing new Churches.

As we mature, we offer worship and praise from our more mature hearts. As the child grows, it develops and reflects its parent. While the gifts build us up, edify us, as we mature, we may be less reliant on them because we have a deeper fellowship with Christ. We grow out of the baby stage. We do not need to rely on this scaffolding to stabilise us. We look away from the gifts to the giver. That said, we are exhorted to seek the gifts that edify, *Co 14:1 Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially the gift of speaking what God has revealed. 1Co 14:2 When a person speaks in another language, he doesn't speak to people but to God. No one understands him. His spirit is speaking*

mysteries. 1Co 14:3 But when a person speaks what God has revealed, he speaks to people to help them grow, to encourage them, and to comfort them. GW.

You may say, ‘but what about the miraculous gifts, for example healing?’ Why should we not want that gift? If we have grown in understanding of the nature of healing, we may have resolved that it is not something any longer that is essential to our lives. We are quite happy to die and be forever with the Lord. If the Lord will then He may heal us but our lives do not revolve around staying on this planet, in this life. Paul puts it well, *Php 1:21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. Php 1:22 But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. Php 1:23 For I am in a strait betwixt two, **having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ**; which is far better: Php 1:24 Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.*

If there is a link between the gifts of the Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit, I would say that it is this. If we develop that Christ-like nature that the fruits bring, that sap from the tree of life, Christ, flowing in our lives, then we shall have the same desires and concerns as He did. This should encourage the gifts to be directed for the glory of God and the benefit of His people. This is the point that the Apostle Paul makes when he shows us the ‘way of excellence’. *1Co 13:2 I may have the gift to speak what God has revealed, and I may understand all mysteries and have all knowledge. I may even have enough faith to move mountains. But if I don't have love, I am nothing. GW.* Without that fruit of the Spirit called ‘love’, we devalue the gifts.

All gifts are mutually supportive. We should also exercise a ministry which corresponds to our spiritual gifts and not usurp the calling of another. This dilemma is illustrated by the story of a certain sea captain and his chief engineer who were having an argument as to which one of them was the more important to the ship. Failing to agree, they resorted to the unique idea of swapping places. The chief engineer ascended to the bridge, and the captain descended into the engine room. After a couple of hours, the captain suddenly appeared on the deck covered with oil and soot. “Chief!” he yelled, wildly waving aloft a monkey wrench. “You’ll have to come down here; I can’t make her go!” “Of course you can’t,” replied the chief. “She’s aground!” *Php 2:3 Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.*

If a gift is used in an unseemly, unloving manner, how can we associate that with the desire of someone to edify us? We are very sensitive creatures to love and we can tell quite easily if a person cares for us or whether they behave out of emotionless duty. We can tell sincerity from hypocrisy, we can feel it. Solomon was right when he said, *Pro 15:17 Better to have a dish of vegetables where there is love than juicy steaks where there is hate. GW.* Something good, something magnificent can be ruined by a lack of love.

Well, we have then eliminated many aspects of the work of the Holy Spirit with as yet touching on the Baptism with the Spirit. I think that now we are in a position to begin to understand this special work.

20. Baptism with the Holy Spirit.

Finally, we arrive at our consideration of the “Baptism with the Holy Spirit”. We have seen what it is not and now we look to what it is. The questions that we ask are, “What is the experience of the Baptism with the Holy Spirit as demonstrated in Acts and is it still a valid phenomenon today?” I repeat that I am not asking the question as to whether the gift of the Spirit, the giftS of the Spirit, the

sanctification of the Spirit, the power of the Spirit, the fruit of the Spirit, the manifestation of the Spirit, the ministration of the Spirit, the earnest of the Spirit, the fellowship of the Spirit, the birth by the Spirit, praying in the Spirit and so forth still exists and are valid today. What I am suggesting is that none of these are the Baptism with the Spirit. I am asking specifically whether this precise manifestation, the 'Baptism with the Holy Spirit' occurs today. Do not confuse the various other operations of the Spirit as we look at this.

If I were to identify partitions within the scripture, I would say:

1. The Older Testament may be described as '**the Acts of the Father**', Creation to Christ
2. The Gospels as '**the Acts of the Son Jesus**', Incarnation to the Cross
3. The Books of the New Testament as '**the Acts of the Holy Spirit**', Pentecost to Judgement day.

We call the book of Acts, the Acts of the Apostles but only a few Apostles are mentioned and only two leaders, Peter and Paul have a high profile. This book and those following are more to the point the Acts of the Spirit, bringing Christ to the World. Following Jesus Resurrection and Ascension, the Spirit now works to generate the testimony of the Gospel and the grace of God in the heart of a believer. *Joh 14:26 But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.* The Holy Spirit continues the work of Jesus.

In the Baptism with the Holy Spirit we are looking at Jesus Baptising the believers with the Holy Spirit, as a man might baptise you with water. I will suggest that this is something totally different to what Paul has in mind when he writes, *1Co 12:13 For **by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body**, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.* Here Paul is looking at the work of the Spirit Himself baptising us into the body of Christ, not Christ baptising us into His body, as is the case with the baptism **with** the Holy Spirit. It may seem a small point to make but I think that it is an important point. Who is baptising whom?

The phenomenon of 'The Baptism with the Holy Spirit' is associated with the Gospel witness. *Act 1:8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both **in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.*** I believe that this verse is critical to our understanding of this phenomenon. This verse shows the clear association between the outpouring of the Spirit and the geographical expansion of the Gospel. Firstly Jerusalem and Judea (at Pentecost), then Samaria as the Gospel was carried on the wave of persecution and finally beyond Judaism to the Gentiles in the uttermost parts of the earth.

The epi-centre of Christianity is Jerusalem, and the Gospel explodes into the surrounding regions of Judea, then Samaria and then the wider world, the world of the gentiles. The Spirit has an ordered and logical program of evangelism. It was not "let us go to some far off place, let's go to Gaul or India and create a mission there". It was a progression from where the Exodus of Jesus had commenced and like a bomb exploding, the pressure wave expands from the epi-centre, Jerusalem.

I believe that understanding this is essential to an understanding of the Baptism with the Holy Spirit. I say this because there are three "Pentecosts" that are associated with the Gospel expansion from each of these borders. A Pentecost in Jerusalem and Judea, a Pentecost in Samaria and a Pentecost

among the gentiles in Caesarea (which served as an administrative centre of Judea Province of the Roman Empire). The three 'Pentecosts' have in common the Spirit of God falling on those assembled in some manner that was extraordinary, to the point that people could see that something had happened. I do not say that the extraordinary phenomenon was speaking in tongues on each occasion, but I will return to this. These Pentecosts, one at Jerusalem , one in Samaria and one in Caesarea (marking the Gentile expansion to 'the uttermost parts of the earth') are the spiritual waypoints in the Book of Acts that mark the development of early Christianity.

However, before we examine that in more detail, we need to understand the background to these historic events. The 'baptism' is announced by John the Baptist, *Mat 3:11 I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you **with the Holy Ghost, and with fire**: Mat 3:12 Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and **gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire***. The baptism is to some degree associated with judgement upon the nation of Israel. It is associated with a harvest, the gathering of 'wheat' into His 'garner' and the burning away of the chaff. In this sense it is a type of cleansing, purging of the Nation.

It is reminiscent of Isaiah's prophecy of the 'branch', the Messiah. *Isa 4:2 In that day shall **the branch of the LORD** be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel. Isa 4:3 And it shall come to pass, that he that is left in Zion, and **he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, even every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem**: Isa 4:4 When the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by **the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning***. It is probably for this reason that the tongues of fire appear upon the Apostles.

There is also an association between the grain harvest and Pentecost also known as the feast of weeks. *Deu 16:9 Seven weeks shalt thou number unto thee: begin to number **the seven weeks from such time as thou beginnest to put the sickle to the corn**. Deu 16:10 And thou shalt keep the feast of weeks unto the LORD thy God with a tribute of a freewill offering of thine hand, which thou shalt give unto the LORD thy God, according as the LORD thy God hath blessed thee: Deu 16:11 And thou shalt rejoice before the LORD thy God, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite that is within thy gates, and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, that are among you, in the place which the LORD thy God hath chosen to place his name there. Deu 16:12 And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in Egypt: and thou shalt observe and do these statutes*. Pentecost was the end of the corn harvest, so we can see the association that is being made between the events of the harvest day of Pentecost, the outpouring of the Spirit and the gathering of God's people in Christ¹⁹.

I believe that Jesus Himself spoke of this Pentecost. *Joh 7:37 In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. Joh 7:38 He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. Joh 7:39 (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)* Now we have already shown

¹⁹ According to Jewish tradition, Pentecost commemorates God's giving of the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai, 49 days after the Exodus. The Talmud derives this from a calculation based on Biblical texts. There is even a Jewish tradition that King David was born and died at Pentecost.

that the Holy Spirit was already at work in God's people and the Disciples before Pentecost and so this must be referring to a totally different manifestation of the Spirit. It is a manifestation associated with His Glory.

This accords with what is said in Acts. *Act 2:32 This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Act 2:33 **Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.** Isa 4:5 And the LORD will create upon every dwelling place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for upon all the glory shall be a defence.*

The Baptism with the Spirit is accompanied by the phenomena of speaking in other languages and tongues of fire upon their heads. *Act 1:4 And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. Act 1:5 For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.* In due time this happened, *Act 2:33 Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, **which ye now see and hear.*** What these people heard was the Bible in their own language. *Act 2:11 Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them **speak in our tongues** the wonderful works of God.* These are known languages and we should, I think, stop using the term 'unknown tongues' or even 'tongues' to describe what are clearly languages. The word unknown is inserted in Corinthians.

This unity of the Spirit is shown in the unity of language and purpose, and is the direct antithesis of the events at Babel. *Gen 11:6 And the LORD said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Gen 11:7 Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. Gen 11:8 So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city. Gen 11:9 Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.*

We tend to see the phenomenon of 'tongues' as central to the Pentecostal experience but I want to question that notion. Imagine for a moment that the people on the day of Pentecost were all Judeans, Jews, people whose only language was Aramaic. The consequence would be that 'tongues' would be pointless. The Apostles could speak the great things of God to them, in the listeners' language, in Aramaic. 'Tongues', other languages, which in the context are known foreign languages, would have no purpose whatsoever to locals, because no one would understand them. It would be like someone speaking to us in Swahili, it would make no sense. **The reason that we have 'tongues', other languages, is that there are people present who speak other languages,** and they are there as religious tourists, visitors to Jerusalem. The tongues are merely the vehicle to convey an important message and that central message was, *Act 2:11 we do hear them speak in our tongues **the wonderful works of God.*** Creation glorifies the Creator because, *Rev 4:11 Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.* This is not about us and our experiences, it is about glorifying God.

If I am correct and language was the vehicle of the revelation of Gods' glorious works, why are people more concerned with the experience of 'tongues', rather than the putting forth of God's wonderful works. I suggest that it is because it is more about 'us' and less about 'Him'. It is about our self aggrandisement rather than the glorification of the Creator. It is a 'ME ME' experience rather than the experience of a servant glorifying his Master. In the light of what has just been said, a further question comes to mind. "If tongues are merely a vehicle to convey a message, and the situation was such that tongues were not required, what would the sign be that showed that the Spirit had been manifest?" In other words, what would the phenomenon be that accompanied the 'Baptism with the Spirit'? We may find the answer later when we see the Samaritan Pentecost but for now we need to see that the events of Pentecost are in fulfilment of an ancient 600 year old prophecy that was given before Solomon's Temple was destroyed.

*Act 2:16 But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; Act 2:17 And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and **your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: Act 2:18 And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy:** Act 2:19 And I will shew **wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath;** blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: Act 2:20 The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: Act 2:21 And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.* The prophecy was given in a day when the Nation of Israel seemed doomed and its religion about to perish along with its sacred buildings. Within 20 years the Jews would be in Babylon. Joel takes them to a brighter, future, future.

Joel does not mention speaking in other languages, although we would not rule that out if it were part of 'prophecy', since prophecy does not always mean telling the future (John 4:19). In fact, using the word prophecy in its sense of 'speaking forth' (προφητεύω = prophēteuō a compound word meaning to forth tell), is exactly what 'tongues', language, enables. The point that I am making is that whatever happens, whatever the phenomenon, it is all about declaring the things of God. If that required speaking in another language, that language ability is secondary to the message. The prophetic message is the important thing.

Let us try and draw these ideas together. Jerusalem is the location for the first occurrence of the Baptism with the Spirit. It is a corporate experience not an isolated individual experience. Let us emphasise this point. I do not see that an individual, praying in their room should expect this phenomenon of the Baptism with the Spirit. Where it occurs it involves a group of people. It has a specific purpose of revealing Christ the Creator from the Word of God, through the power of the Spirit. It is a common experience, to use the phrase, which, 'gels the body together'. By the common experience, the oneness in Christ is shown. Even when Paul receives the Spirit at the hands of Ananias, it is through and in the presence of another believer, linking them to the body of Christ.

Note this also, that the Spirit falls upon all present without recorded reference to the depth of individual faith or obedience. It does not depend upon the individual, it is not sought out by the recipients, they are not told to seek the Baptism with the Spirit, but it happens spontaneously. It was not even expected at Cornelius' dwelling when the Spirit fell upon all of his household and it took the Apostle Peter by surprise. *Act 10:45 And they of the circumcision which believed **were***

astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. The baptism with the Spirit experience is all inclusive and not selective of individuals and it appears to be quite public rather than a personal experience in the privacy of one's own home. This again suggests the unifying nature of the phenomenon bringing Jew and Gentile, bond and free together in one Church under Jesus the head, in one voice and language.

What would have happened to the Church if there was no Baptism with the Spirit? I think that the various churches arising in Judea, Samaria and the gentile world would have lacked an essential unity that the experience brought. There would be no links in the chain of faith. The Baptism with the Spirit is a statement that **we are all one** in Christ Jesus, *Col 3:11 Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all... Gal 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.*

Moving on, we see the Gospel delivered to Samaria by the Apostle Philip. The Samaritans were despised by the Jews, they were an ancient mongrel of Jewish and Gentile parents born in the aftermath of the Babylonian captivity. *Act 8:14 Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: Act 8:15 Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: Act 8:16 (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Act 8:17 Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.*

Simon the Magician wants this power. *Act 8:18 And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, Act 8:19 Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.* I make two observations here. Firstly the Spirit may come before or after water baptism. 'After' here and 'before' in Acts chapter 10, *Act 10:47 Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?* Secondly, there is no mention of foreign languages being spoken in Samaria, yet there was some visible sign of the Spirit upon them.

Were tongues needed or are they just not mentioned? How was the Spirit recognised? As we have suggested, if there were no foreigners present, tongues would serve no purpose. If this is so, what phenomenon did Simon Magus witness? I suggest it was prophecy because that is one of the signs mentioned by Joel. It would be similar to the event that happened in Saul's life, *1Sa 10:10 And when they came thither to the hill, behold, a company of prophets met him; and the Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied among them.* This is something that happened to the seventy elders in Moses day.

Finally we come to the gentile outpouring. You know the story of Peter's vision of the clean and unclean animals and the lesson that he had to learn, that what God calls clean, no man must call unclean. It is with this message that he arrives at the house of a Roman Centurion and preaches the Gospel. *Act 10:42 And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. Act 10:43 To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.*

It is while he is speaking that God interrupts him, *Act 10:44 While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. Act 10:45 And they of the circumcision which*

believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. Act 10:46 For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Act 10:47 Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?

It is another Pentecost but a gentile Pentecost. The hearers of the message speak in other languages. It is not clear whether it is the Romans speaking Aramaic to the Jews, or the Jews speaking Latin to the Romans but the whole experience is again directed to the glory of God. They spoke and “Magnified God”. Is it the tongues or the magnifying, as people say today, the ‘bigging up’ of God that is more important.

The final example is when the Gospel arrives at Ephesus. *Act 19:1 And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, Act 19:2 He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. Act 19:3 And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Act 19:4 Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. Act 19:5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Act 19:6 And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and **they spake with tongues, and prophesied**. Act 19:7 And all the men were about twelve.* This experience again ties the disciples of John into the Christian Church. Again, the ‘tongues’, the language phenomenon, is linked to prophecy.

Let me make some concluding remarks that you may go away and test for accuracy.

1. The Baptism with the Holy Spirit may precede water baptism or it may succeed water baptism. There is no rule.
2. The phenomenon of languages serves as the vehicle to convey the message of God’s glory. It conveys a message across ethnic boundaries and cultures.
3. The essence of the Baptism with the Spirit is prophecy.
4. ‘Tongues’, languages, serve no purpose if people all speak the same language.
5. Baptism with the Spirit is a corporate and not an individual experience.
6. There is no command to pray for this experience, indeed it is beyond the control of man, a sin to even request the power to give it (Magus), and comes as and when the Spirit wills, not man.

In the light of what we have said, I must question why anyone would seek the Baptism with the Spirit. The gift of languages is of course another thing and something given to edify either individuals or the body of Christ but that I suggest is not what the Baptism with the Spirit is all about.

Ask yourself what you are really seeking. Is it a spiritual experience for your self or is it for the glory of God. I must say that over the last forty years, I have never met anyone who wanted the Baptism with the Spirit with the express purpose of Glorify God and advance the Gospel.

21. Joseph (prepared for greatness).

Shakespeare wrote in 'Twelfth Night', "Be not afraid of greatness. Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and others have greatness thrust upon them." I would suggest that as we examine the life of Joseph we shall see that all of these are true of him. He was born great, he achieved greatness and that greatness was thrust upon him.

He was born great into the family of the patriarch Jacob but he also knew by the dreams that God gave him that he was to be great. He achieved greatness through the immense wisdom God gave him, whether as a steward, a prisoner or a ruler. He had greatness thrust upon him when he became one of the most powerful people in the ancient world. None of this, of course was due to what men call chance. It was all part of the Divine Providence, which, as we shall see, used Joseph for a very special purpose.

We shall examine the transformations in Joseph's life that prepare him for greatness, the life changing events that made him at the relatively early age of 30 years, a fit governor of Egypt. It is as we shall see, not what we would consider as the path to executive success. Yet despite the setbacks that we see in Joseph's life, he has an unbroken relationship with his God. That I will suggest is the key to his success.

But, to begin at the beginning. Joseph was the eleventh son of Jacob and the first born of his mother Rachel, who was not able to have any children for a long period of time. He was orphaned, it is suggested, at the age of 6 years and according to Jewish tradition, his mother's handmaid Bilhah brought up Joseph and was wet nurse to his new brother Benjamin. I have a sadness for this young boy, surrounded by his older brothers and their mothers who did not like his mother Rachel. Was he bullied? Was he lonely, touching the heart of his father and so becoming a favourite? The son of his old age was given a special coat, a long coat, as a mark of that affection. *Gen 37:3 And Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons, because he was a son of old age to him. And he made a robe reaching to the soles of his feet.* LITV. That of course did even more to alienate Joseph from his brothers.

I believe that Joseph was out of a different mould than his father Jacob and his brothers. His father was a crook, a 'heel grabber' from his birth, a deceiver who himself was deceived. Perhaps he admired those better qualities he saw in his son Joseph, who is honest to a fault, if one dare say that. Joseph is the only character in Genesis who has nothing negative written about him. He is as 'straight as a die', thoroughly trustworthy, a man who would do his work diligently.

He could not compromise with evil and when he saw his brothers do evil, he reported it to his Father, *Gen 37:2 These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brethren; and the lad was with the sons of Bilhah, and with the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives: and Joseph brought unto his father their evil report.* There are those who would say that Joseph was sneaky, telling his father and that he went behind his brothers' backs but there is no evidence for this. I think that Joseph would have spoken against his brothers before going to his father.

I know many who would point the finger at Joseph on this account. They would say that he was a talebearer, they would accuse him of sin without the slightest evidence. Yet this self same thing they accuse him of is one of the most prolific sins in the Church. People complaining about others behind

their backs and refusing to do anything about what they see as a fault in another. Let us beware of this sin for it is a sin against the Spirit of God, because it is a sin that breaks the unity of the Spirit.

Joseph is a courageous young man in the face of his brutal brothers, especially Simeon and Levi. It makes you wonder why the Lord chose this dysfunctional family to be the foundation of the nation of Israel? Yet that is the whole point, it is all of grace and the worst sinners may show the greatest transformations. It is also out of this that Joseph rises to show that one's birth family, their influence and their faults, does not fix our future in the Lord. We can soar above it and it does not have to taint us. Joseph shows that you do not have to be a 'victim' of circumstance. Joseph is not afraid of the truth and he will tell the truth whatever it costs him. I think that it is this quality that readily fits him for his prophetic office, or perhaps as we should call him in those days, a seer.

The situation with the family is not good, *Gen 37:4 And his brethren having seen that his father loved him more than all his sons, **hated him, and could not speak anything peaceable to him.** Gen 37:5 And Joseph dreamed a dream, and reported it to his brethren.* The brothers hated Joseph and never had a good word to say to him, but rather than make him cower, it emboldened him. Joseph was given an inkling of the future but I suggest, not just his own but the distant future of a relative who would deliver the future Israel.

In the first prophecy, Joseph warns his brothers that they would prostrate themselves before him, like wheat sheaves laid in a field. They would bow to him. It did not go down well, *Gen 37:8 And his brethren said to him, Shalt thou indeed reign over us? or shalt thou indeed have dominion over us? And they hated him yet the more for his dreams, and for his words.* In his next pronouncement, his father was involved. *Gen 37:9 And he dreamed yet another dream, and told it his brethren, and said, Behold, I have dreamed a dream more; and, behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me. Gen 37:10 And he told it to his father, and to his brethren: and his father rebuked him, and said unto him, What is this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth? Gen 37:11 And his brethren envied him; but his father observed the saying.*

Joseph's mother was dead and so it was a symbolic picture that Joseph gives. It was a strange thing to say but if Jacob had really understood the prophecy, he would not have been heartbroken when Joseph disappeared. He could not figure it out. Christ speaks through Joseph to his day and elevates the truth to its fulfilment in Christ Himself. *Php 2:9 Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: Php 2:10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth;*

Joseph was a type, a shadow of Jesus. His relationship with his brothers, Israel, is exactly the same as Jesus relationship with national Israel in His day. Stephen, in his last great sermon preaches to the Synagogue of the Jews, that their whole history was of one of rejection of the Spirit of God and the persecution of the prophets. *Act 7:51 Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Act 7:52 Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers:*

Among the examples that Stephen gives is Joseph. *Act 7:9 And the patriarchs, **moved with envy,** sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him, Act 7:10 And delivered him out of all his afflictions, and*

gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house. Joseph was hated without cause. The descendents of these very brothers, the sons of Jacob, the future Jews, would crucify the One whom Joseph in a type portrays.

I wonder if Jesus had Joseph in mind when He told this story? *Mar 12:6 Having yet therefore one son, his wellbeloved, he sent him also last unto them, saying, They will reverence my son. Mar 12:7 But those husbandmen said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours. Mar 12:8 And they took him, and killed him, and cast him out of the vineyard. Mar 12:9 What shall therefore the lord of the vineyard do? he will come and destroy the husbandmen, and will give the vineyard unto others. Mar 12:10 And have ye not read this scripture; The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner: Mar 12:11 This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? Mar 12:12 And they sought to lay hold on him, but feared the people: for they knew that he had spoken the parable against them: and they left him, and went their way.*

It is not my intention here to go through the types of Christ that appear in Joseph's life, merely to state that they are there. Many have found them, such as Henry Francis Lyte, who made the connection precisely in his famous hymn, 'Praise my soul, the King of Heaven'.

Angels, help us to adore Him;
Ye behold Him face to face;
Sun and moon, bow down before Him,
Dwellers all in time and space:
Praise Him! praise Him!
Praise with us the God of grace.

Psa 148:3 Praise ye him, sun and moon: praise him, all ye stars of light.

The wicked brothers plot their revenge and as you know, sold Joseph as a slave to merchant men. These selfish brothers had not considered for one moment the effect that it would have on their aged father. Such is their wickedness and hatred, that they thought only of themselves. Jacob would as a consequence grieve for the next 13 years.

We follow Joseph into the house of the captain of Pharaoh's guard, where we observe, *Gen 39:2 And the LORD was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian.* Where Joseph went, God went with him. This should be a great comfort for the Christian. The perverse providence that sent Joseph to Egypt was not sending him away from God but was God going with him into a new experience, developing the skills and the contacts for the unfolding plan.

If there is a character trait that stands out in Joseph's life and one that stands him in good stead for his great task, it is that he is a carer for people. Whether in the slave owner's house, the prison, or the palace, Joseph cares for and takes care of those around him. It is what he does best and it is a Divine attribute, *1Pe 5:7 Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.* We might think that this is a particular gift, something that only a few possess but I would disagree with that notion. A person who cares is a person who will be liberated from his self obsession. He will become a bigger person with a bigger family. As we observe with Joseph, the circumstances in which he found himself did not affect his level of caring for those around him.

Joseph does not for a moment appear to create an escape programme, to get out of Egypt and return home. *1Co 7:20 All people should stay as they were when they were called. 1Co 7:21 Were you a slave when you were called? That shouldn't bother you. However, if you have a chance to become free, take it.* GW. Perhaps in some respects he is glad to be rid of his brothers, who would not be? Instead he settles in to his duties with good grace and energy until the boss's wife takes a shine to him. According to Egyptian history, there are a few records of men being brought to court for having sex with married women but it is unclear whether these were cases of sex between consenting partners or rape, and no judgments are known. That said, the scorned woman is definitely out for revenge and will make the most of it.

Having had 3 millennia to discuss the way Joseph should have approached this dilemma, we are often extremely condemnatory towards him. Joseph did not have a 'dummies guides to women' for young men, or any older people to guide him and I do not think that he considered that he was doing anything wrong. Can we judge Joseph's 'present', from our 'future'? Should he have followed the Billy Graham rule (the 'Billy Graham rule' is a practice among male Protestant Christian leaders, in which they avoid spending any time alone with women to whom they are not married) but Joseph did not know that? Let us be kind to him and give him a break, he was only about 20 years old or so and not as we say, 'a man of the world'.

Joseph was a slave and he did what he was told. If he had gone to his master with a complaint, there would have been no evidence to support him. Potiphar's wife would have lied her way out of it and it would have caused unnecessary trouble. Joseph continued to do his job up to the point where the frustrated wife turned to anger and to revenge.

A characteristic of Joseph and one that Christians should readily adopt, is that he never let his circumstances define who he was. Because life had some catastrophic downturns, he did not sit bemoaning the 'hand' that God had given him, he did not question the justice of his cause, he did not rage against the darkness. Joseph got on with life. Joseph to the contrary defines his circumstances by who he is with and he masters them. **God is with him.** He exhibits a high level of contentment because of this like Paul. *Php 4:11 Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.*

There is something to observe in the life of Joseph that is relevant to each and every believer today. You might think that what I will say is presumptuous, that it is quite wrong to apply the experience of Joseph to our own lives but I hope to show that it is quite correct. I am referring to the fact that in Joseph's life, it is observed on more than one occasion that 'Jehovah was with him', *Gen 39:3 And his master saw that **the LORD was with him**, and that the LORD made all that he did to prosper in his hand.....Gen 39:21 But **the LORD was with Joseph**, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison.*

Despite the cyclic nature of Joseph's fortunes, he was never on his own. From the pit to the palace, the pit his brother's threw him in, to Potiphar's house, to the prison and to Pharaoh's palace, downs and ups, at every stage **the Lord was with him**. I will go further and say this, that Joseph knew that the Lord was with him. He had what many of us would call a 'sense of destiny'. He understood that his life had purpose because he understood that 'Jehovah was with him'. He could say to his sinful brothers, *Gen 50:20 But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but **God meant it unto good**, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.* Is he unique in this respect?

Why are we Christians not like that? Can we sing, 'I have a destiny I know I shall fulfil, I have a destiny in that city on a hill, I have a destiny and it's not an empty wish, For I know I was born for such a time as this'? It is just wrong to chorus this if we do not believe it. It may not be as grandiose as Joseph's destiny but you and I have one and it is for the very reason that 'God is with you'.

What sort of person can say that? What person can say "God is with me"? I can and you can. *Rom 8:28 And we know that **all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*** Those words could have been written by Joseph. In the pit, in the prison, what hope was there for Joseph? None, if he did not understand the fact that "**The Lord was with him**". It is a great transformation in the life of a Christian when we can truly come to terms with this great truth. When we can say, "The Lord is with me". *Psa 118:6 **The LORD is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?** Psa 91:14 Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name.* Now I am not suggesting that these words mean deliverance from the physical evils of this world but I do strongly suggest that it will deliver from the fears of this life, "this short uncertain earthly life and pilgrimage".

I want you to ask yourself, can you say that 'God is with me?' Do you feel that is a bit excessive, immodest, boastful or arrogant? Why should you feel that? It is either true or it is false, God is either with you or He is not with you. You cannot let false modesty steal that truth, satan would make you feel unworthy but it is not about our worthiness, we have none. It is about the worthiness of Christ and He has said this, *Mat 28:20 And, behold, **I am with you all the days until the completion of the age.** Amen.* LITV. Not one day will pass without God being with us. Not one second will pass without God being with us. He will be with us on the dark days when praise is hard to sing and on the bright days when the sound of joy comes easily to our lips.

Please take this thought away with you. Be transformed by it. Think on it and own it. Wake in the morning and say 'God is with me' and lay down at night and say again 'God is with me'. Let this truth transform you. Say it during the day, lift your heads up to the sky and say, 'God is with me'. Joseph knew that and because he knew that, he could endure whatever the world would throw at him. As David observed, *Psa 23:4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil; **for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.*** LITV. If the Lord is my Shepherd, the Lord is with me.

I heard a story about a Sunday School teacher who asked her group of children if anyone could quote the entire 23rd Psalm. A golden-haired, four-and-a-half-year-old girl was among those who raised their hands. A bit sceptical, the teacher asked if she could really quote the entire psalm. The little girl came to the front of the room, faced the class, made a perky little bow, and said, "The Lord is my shepherd, that's all I want." She bowed again and went and sat down. That may well be the greatest interpretation of the 23rd Psalm ever heard.

If we adopt those Christ like characteristics of Joseph, life would be far less stressful. I have already mentioned that heightened consciousness of the presence of God in our lives. Add to that the certainty that "man's evil becomes God's good" and we have a further reason not to be swept into the bitterness and hatreds that develop amongst men. *Gen 50:20 But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.* To be in that state of constant anxiety and ill will towards others, especially believers, is to deny that things work for good to the people of God, but the history of Christianity shows that few

come to understand this in practice. The Christian has the opportunity to be at peace in his soul, if he will accept the ultimate goodness of God as a present reality. There can be no such creature as a miserable Christian, a depressed Christian, if God is with us. If God is with us and we are in Christ, the very nature of God must flow in our lives and the fruit of the Spirit is the product.

This highlights one of the great weaknesses of the modern Gospel. It emphasises salvation without discipleship. It emphasises redemption without a continuing relationship with the Creator. It fails to show how the believer overcomes the world, the flesh and the devil. It fails Christians because they are not “overcomers”, conquerors as they should be, because they fail to see “God is with me”. They are not living in the Kingdom of God, willing subjects of the King, living lives worthy of the King. That is why God is with me, because I am with Him in His Kingdom, in His world.

One final thought. *Gen 41:45 And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphnathpaaneah; and he gave him to wife Asenath the daughter of Potipherah priest of On. And Joseph went out over all the land of Egypt.* There appears to be little agreement as to the meaning of this name, *Zaphnathpaaneah*, and perhaps that is just the point. It was known to the King and it was known by Joseph, but not by us.

To those who live victoriously, God has a new name. It is not given as a reward for failure to achieve. *Rev 2:17 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which **no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it**.* Just like Joseph we have a new personal name, known unto God and us alone, the victors.

22. Josiah (reformer of the heart).

Josiah (the one who found the Scripture) the greatest king to ever rule Israel, started his reign when he was only eight years old. *2Ki 22:1 Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty and one years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Jedidah, the daughter of Adaiah of Boscath. 2Ki 22:2 And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in all the way of David his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left.*

It was to be the duty of each King to write his own copy of the Law. *Deu 17:18 And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law (LXX δευτερονομιον) in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites: Deu 17:19 And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them: Deu 17:20 That his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand, or to the left: to the end that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he, and his children, in the midst of Israel.* The LXX has the book to be copied as Deuteronomy (δευτερονομιον) though some old writers thought it was the whole Pentateuch.

It is a shame that the Lord did not make it a rule that all Christians should make their own handwritten copy of the NT. At least they would read it once. In the OT, it was done by the King to remind the King of his Kingly duties, to both set an example and uphold the law. There was just one problem for Josiah and that was the original copy of the law had been lost. He could not make a copy so we might ask by what light did he walk? We shall try to answer that question.

Later on in his life the story is told of the high priest finding the Book of the Law which had been neglected and hidden for years. This caused Josiah to tear his clothes and plead with the Lord to not punish Israel for their disobedience to God's Word. Only Josiah would be spared. *2Ki 22:19 Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the LORD, when thou heardest what I spake against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and hast rent thy clothes, and wept before me; I also have heard thee, saith the LORD. 2Ki 22:20 Behold therefore, I will gather thee unto thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace; and thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place. And they brought the king word again.*

Josiah then read the Book of the Law publicly and made a covenant with the Lord along with his people (2 Kings 23:3) to obey the Lord with all of his heart and soul. This is truly a marvellous story of repentance, spiritual leadership, and the mercy of God!

Josiah's story starts remarkably, 300 years before he was born, just after the death of King Solomon. Jeroboam and Rehoboam (Solomon's son) were involved in Solomon's legacy of a divided Kingdom. *1Ki 11:26 And Jeroboam the son of Nebat, an Ephrathite of Zereda, Solomon's servant, whose mother's name was Zeruah, a widow woman, even he lifted up his hand against the king.* The Kingdom was split with Rehoboam having one tribe and Jeroboam ten tribes (presumably Levi was the 12th tribe distributed all over Israel). Solomon had turned against the Lord and this was the consequence, *1Ki 11:9 And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the LORD God of Israel, **which had appeared unto him twice.***

Jeroboam decided to implement a 'divide and conquer' policy and set up two false sacrificial sites so that Israel would be drawn away from Jerusalem. Two golden calves were built, one in Bethel in the North and one in Dan, in the South. It was while he was sacrificing at Bethel that a prophet came with a message. *1Ki 13:1 And, behold, there came a man of God out of Judah by the word of the LORD unto Bethel: and Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense. 1Ki 13:2 And he cried against the altar in the word of the LORD, and said, O altar, altar, thus saith the LORD; Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee.*

This is an incredibly accurate prophecy and despite the turbulent intervening times nothing could affect the certainty of this coming event. This is because there is no uncertainty with the Lord. This coming child of the house of David would become the greatest earthly King that ever lived. *2Ki 23:25 **And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the LORD with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him.*** This statement elevates Josiah above King David, King Solomon and King Hezekiah. There is in his story a type of the Messiah King, who would re-establish righteousness.

Josiah means 'foundation of the Lord', perhaps to show the contrast between true worship and the false foundations of idolatry set up by Rehoboam. This boy King ascends to the throne aged 8 years. Can you remember life aged eight? I can and it existed in play, birthdays, Christmas, Firework night, school, Sunday school, everything done and provided for. My great ambition was to own a red hulled plastic sailing yacht that sat centre place in the window of a big toy shop in the town where I lived. I looked at it longingly each Saturday and though I did not get it that year, I did eventually own it. That

was the privileged life that I lived, not a care in the world. Josiah at age eight assumed the responsibility of Kingship, a man's role and a difficult one in a nation that was increasingly godless.

Can you remember what life was like as a teenager? Still as carefree as at age eight but with a few more interests, girlfriends, music, clothes, just as trivial as at age eight and still no real responsibility in the world. For Josiah life was becoming serious at age sixteen. *2Ch 34:3 For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father: and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images.* At sixteen years old Josiah was becoming an iconoclast. He had become religious and he knew that what he saw around him was not what his great ancestor wanted.

How did Josiah know to do this thing? He has not yet come to the point in his life where he has found the 'law of the Lord'. Those ancient scrolls still lie in the derelict Temple where they had been lost. He does not have what we have to guide him. He does not have a Bible. The scrolls are found when he is twenty six years old, and begins the refurbishment of the Temple. *2Ki 22:8 And Hilkiah the high priest said unto Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD. And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it.*

How could Josiah exist with such little information at his disposal? The downgrade in Israel was not recent, it went back over 300 years to Solomon who apostatised and Josiah would clear it out. *2Ki 23:13 And the high places that were before Jerusalem, which were on the right hand of the mount of corruption, which Solomon the king of Israel had builded for Ashtoreth the abomination of the Zidonians, and for Chemosh the abomination of the Moabites, and for Milcom the abomination of the children of Ammon, did the king defile.*

The picture of Josiah's Kingdom is bleak. The law had been forsaken and as we know they eventually went into captivity because they had never had a land Sabbath since entering Canaan and the Passover had not been celebrated properly either. How then had the Jewish religion continued in the absence of the law, the Divine rule book? It had become an admixture of paganism and oral tradition. Can you imagine what it was like being brought up Israel? Paganism, devil worship, would have seemed quite normal because that would have been all that you knew from your childhood. It is probably like being brought up in any religion, it would be normal to you and you would not question it. People brought up in Catholicism and Anglicanism sees the fabric surrounding their religion as normal. The statues, candles, the altars, fonts, the Mass, the stained glass, surplices, penance, mitres, structures, genuflections, all would be normal, although I doubt that many understand where it came from, why it is needed and whether the Lord has authorised any of it. So too in Josiah's day.

Why is it that the Churches today tolerate such falsehood in the name of God? It is I think quite simply that people are content to submit to the inventions of men without testing them against God's word. The natural man, the carnal man is not that concerned with truth and its consequences. We do not fear God enough to be obedient. We do not see the seriousness of the issues as Josiah did. *2Ki 22:11 And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the book of the law, that he rent his clothes.* That is another great transformation in the life of a believer, when he really sees the significance of God's word and starts measuring the world around him by it.

This makes it all the more amazing that this young man Josiah, begins to untangle his life from all of this error. How did it begin? I will suggest that the Divine grace gave him another spirit. He was a chosen vessel and it says *2Ch 34:3 For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father*: Josiah was curious about his ancestors' God. I would love for some future descendent of mine to seek after my God, where it could be written, 'he began to seek after the God of Michael his father'.

What legacy had David left for Josiah to find? *1Ki 11:5 For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. 1Ki 11:6 And Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and **went not fully after the LORD, as did David his father.** 1Ki 11:7 Then did Solomon build an high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, in the hill that is before Jerusalem, and for Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon. 1Ki 11:8 And likewise did he for all his strange wives, which burnt incense and sacrificed unto their gods.* I will speculate that as young Josiah cast his eye back on his generations, all the way back to Solomon and beyond, there was only one who did not follow the gods of Canaan. One person stood out to him above the others and that was David. *2Ki 22:2 And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in all the way of David his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left.*

David had left his own records, which Josiah observed, *2Ch 35:4 And prepare yourselves by the houses of your fathers, after your courses, **according to the writing of David king of Israel, and according to the writing of Solomon his son.*** I think that this refers back to David's ordering of the Temple. *1Ch 28:19 **All this, said David, the LORD made me understand in writing by his hand upon me, even all the works of this pattern.** 1Ch 28:20 And David said to Solomon his son, Be strong and of good courage, and do it: fear not, nor be dismayed: for the LORD God, even my God, will be with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee, until thou hast finished all the work for the service of the house of the LORD. 1Ch 28:21 And, behold, the courses of the priests and the Levites, even they shall be with thee for all the service of the house of God: and there shall be with thee for all manner of workmanship every willing skilful man, for any manner of service: also the princes and all the people will be wholly at thy commandment.*

Josiah must have realised that the forms of worship he inherited were very different from the forms set up by his ancestor David and his son Solomon. So while it appears that the law had 'conveniently' disappeared, there were other records and it may be that this record of the Temple and its services moved Josiah to his restoration programme. When this begins they find the law, *2Ki 22:8 And Hilkiah the high priest said unto Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD. And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it.* It seems quite clear that churches can run on ritual for years without any understanding of the teaching of God. We can see in our own day how far people have drifted away from their founding fathers while still maintaining the name over the door. I am sure that Wesley, Fox, Luther, Whitfield, Knox, Calvin and a host of others would be appalled at what has happened to their legacy and I dare say that they would dissociate themselves entirely from the modern churches. Those men taught scripture the modern generation teach compromise.

This is where we see the real transformation in Josiah's life. It is the point at which he saw that despite all that had been done in clearing out the false worship he had not found the true worship. *2Ki 22:11 And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the book of the law, that he*

rent his clothes. 2Ki 22:12 And the king commanded Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Achbor the son of Michaiah, and Shaphan the scribe, and Asahiah a servant of the king's, saying, 2Ki 22:13 Go ye, enquire of the LORD for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found: for great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us.

Knocking down idols is not a substitute for obedience. As we shall observe with Gideon, it is all very well knocking down falsehood but what will you put in its place? The devils cast out, return to the swept house with more companions. We need to consider this seriously because Josiah arrived at a time in his life where he realised that the Word of God came with severe consequences if it was neglected. It was not just about outward forms.

At the age of 20 years, Josiah had begun his great purge of the places of devil worship. *2Ch 34:3 For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father: and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images.* In his 26th year he found the scroll of the law when he repaired the Temple. *2Ch 34:8 Now in the eighteenth year of his reign, when he had purged the land, and the house, he sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, and Maaseiah the governor of the city, and Joah the son of Joahaz the recorder, to repair the house of the LORD his God.* We ask, what benefit was it to the nation that Josiah had smashed the places of false worship? None whatsoever.

This is like the transition that many of us believers make. In our early days of faith, we are great at applying God's word, as we know it, to all around us. We become to a degree, iconoclasts. We apply the Word of God to all the evils around us but there comes a moment when we see that it must be applied to us. *1Pe 4:17 For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?* It is the transformation from hypocrite to penitent. As Paul says, *1Co 9:27 But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.*

I think that this happens to Josiah when the law is discovered. The implications and consequences of the law are interpreted by the prophetess Huldah. It is not encouraging, *2Ki 22:16 Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the words of the book which the king of Judah hath read: 2Ki 22:17 Because they have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands; therefore my wrath shall be kindled against this place, and shall not be quenched.*

Knocking down the buildings and properties of Apostate churches does not remove the apostate followers. They go underground. It reminded me of the time of the English Commonwealth²⁰.

.... under the command of the staunch Puritan, Oliver Cromwell, Parliamentary forces won out. In 1649 the King was executed, the monarchy was abolished, and the Church (of England) was forced underground. For the next ten years Cromwell ruled England as "Lord Protector of the Commonwealth" and the Puritan party attempted to impose their

²⁰ <http://www.anglican catholic.org/conflict-and-restoration?class=greenlink>

own vision of what a godly state should look like. They did away with the episcopacy and put many thousands of clergymen out of their parishes. They did away with the Book of Common Prayer and instituted services focused upon long sermons and extemporaneous devotions. Marriages in churches were prohibited, and the dead were often buried without religious ceremony. Church buildings were desecrated, as altars, organs, baptismal fonts, paintings, stained glass windows, and statues were all destroyed. When the Lord Protector died in 1658, he was succeeded by his son, Richard, but by that time, most of the English people had had quite enough Puritanism and republicanism and longed for a change.

Everything reverted at the Restoration of the monarchy. The point being that despite implementing outward reforms, nothing in the hearts of men had changed and this is the case in Josiah's Israel. You can smash an idol **OF** the heart but you cannot smash the idol **IN** the heart, that is the Spirit's work.

When Paul is in Ephesus, the silversmiths are up in arms against him claiming that he has ruined their business. *Act 19:26 Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands:* But Paul did not smash the idols, in fact he did not 'bad mouth' that worship, and it was said in his defence, *Act 19:37 For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess.* Paul's method was to preach the supremacy of Christ. Paul does not mock the altar of the unknown God on Mars hill but declares the true God.

We will do more harm to the cause of Christ by direct intervention breaking idols. Paul's method was to persuade people of Christ and they would then destroy their own idols. *Act 19:18 And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds. Act 19:19 Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.* I wondered whether the confrontational style of dear Ian Paisley and his open condemnation of the Pope as anti-Christ shut the door to the gospel for Roman Catholics?

It should occur to us then, that if we want to see true worship and true faith, it will only come through the pure preaching of Christ. Reform comes to those who find the Saviour and cast off willingly the errors of sinful men.

Josiah's sincerity cannot be doubted but his iconoclasm did not solve the nation's problem which lay in their hearts. Josiah had worked hard on removing idolatry for 6 years (he was 20 years old when he started and he refurbishes the Temple aged 26 years). He probably thought that he was doing well up to the time that the Law was found. That took the problem to a whole new level. *2Ki 22:11 And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the book of the law, that he rent his clothes.....2Ki 22:13 Go ye, enquire of the LORD for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found: for great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us.*

It was not enough just to get the outward forms of worship correct, there was an inner dimension. The heart of Israel was unrighteous and the Law revealed that. Outward forms of worship must be guided by the inward worship through the Word of God. This may be the challenge to the church of the 21st Century, is our worship guided and defined by externals or the internal work of the Spirit?

Yet for all his noble efforts the die was cast, Israel would be destroyed along with the Temple. As a mark of grace and favour, dear Josiah would not see that tragedy, *2Ki 22:19 Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the LORD, when thou heardest what I spake against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and hast rent thy clothes, and wept before me; I also have heard thee, saith the LORD. 2Ki 22:20 Behold therefore, I will gather thee unto thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace; and thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place. And they brought the king word again.*

I have often thought on these words and how far removed our understanding of the Divine plans are from our minds. The words, "gathered to thy grave in peace", might seem to imply a gentle death, as the old cowboys would say, "dying in bed with your boots off". Surrounded by family and friends, full of years, at peace with all, the legacy of the inheritance in the Lord firmly secure, drifting away into glory. That is how we would want it but that is not how the Lord wanted it. Yet it was a death "in Peace". There was nothing to trouble Josiah's soul, even if the means to achieve this was brutal. At the relatively young age of 39 years, Josiah was killed in battle.

To die in peace does not always mean to die without pain. Josiah died in Peace but when he did, all pain was past.

23. Bathsheba (King maker).

Bathsheba, "daughter of an oath", victim or schemer? How should we view the life of 'Bathsheba bat Eliam', daughter of Eliam? Was she an ambitious woman who would do anything to gain power, even seduce a King, or was she a good woman in a world where men had little respect for honour and virtue? Those are the questions that we hope to answer.

As to her lineage, if Eliam mentioned in 2 Samuel chapter 22, is the same as mentioned 2 Samuel chapter 11, we see that Bathsheba is the granddaughter of Ahithopel, David's great counsellor. *2Sam 23:4 Eliphelet the son of Ahasbai, the son of the Maachathite, **Eliam the son of Ahithophel the Gilonite**,.....2Sam 11:3 And David sent and inquired after the woman. And one said, Is not this **Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite**?* Her father Eliam was among David's 'thirty' great warriors. *2Sa 23:24 Asahel the brother of Joab was one **of the thirty**; Elhanan the son of Dodo of Bethlehem, 2Sa 23:34 Eliphelet the son of Ahasbai, the son of the Maachathite, **Eliam the son of Ahithophel the Gilonite**.*

Ahithophel was David's vizier or counsellor who eventually turned against David in favour of his son Absalom, *2Sa 15:12 And Absalom sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counsellor, from his city, even from Giloh, while he offered sacrifices. And the conspiracy was strong; for the people increased continually with Absalom.* We may suggest that Bathsheba had a privileged upbringing and was probably already known to King David through her social contacts. This puts David's behaviour towards Bathsheba in a different light.

I will speculate that David was in his middle years, possibly late 40's early 50's when he took Bathsheba. She is probably young enough to be his daughter and he may even have played with her as a child, when Eliam started his family. As a girl, growing up, she would have already been noticed by David and as a man who lacked a moral conscience at that time, he began to lust after the young woman. All he needed was an opportunity to take her. Perhaps David even plotted Uriah's marriage to keep Bathsheba close to hand.

Bathsheba was married to another of the great warriors, Uriah, *2Sa 23:39 Uriah the Hittite: thirty and seven in all.* Uriah may have been about the same age as her father Eliam, brothers in arms, and in a marriage that was contracted. She did not fall pregnant after her marriage but as we know, it was during her menstrual cleansing that David seduced her. *2Sa 11:2 And it came to pass in an eveningtide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon. 2Sa 11:3 And David sent and enquired after the woman. And one said, Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite? 2Sa 11:4 And David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in unto him, and he lay with her; for she was purified from her uncleanness: and she returned unto her house.*

I do not believe that Bathsheba engineered this meeting with David and set out to seduce him, when she exposed herself at her ritual washing. David was a middle aged man and Bathsheba was part of the wider family. She probably regarded him as a kindly uncle, not as a prospective partner and it is unlikely that she set out to seduce the King. Bathsheba was merely performing her ritual cleansing. *Lev 15:26 Every bed whereon she lieth all the days of her issue shall be unto her as the bed of her separation: and whatsoever she sitteth upon shall be unclean, as the uncleanness of her separation (נִדָּה = niddâh).*

Niddah is the heading for the laws of separation. When a woman has her period, she is impure for seven days. The Torah does not prescribe any purification process here. If a man lies with a menstruating woman, he receives the same impurity and is impure for seven days. If a person touches her, that person is rendered impure until evening. No purification process is prescribed for either of these cases. Any object with which the woman comes in contact becomes unclean, and any person who comes in contact with an object she has rendered impure becomes impure himself or herself. In this last case, the person must wash himself or herself and his or her clothing and then will be pure in the evening.

It was customary of women in those days to bathe and do their washings at the wells and they did so in the evening when it was the cooler hour of the day, just before dusk set in. The Scriptures did not say that Bathsheba was bathing in the open and it does not state in the Scriptures that she was naked. She could very well have bathed with a cloth wrapped round about her, as some Asian women still do today. She also would not have known whether the King was in the palace or would be taking an evening walk on the rooftop. It was neither her privilege nor her business to know about the King's highly confidential schedule.

The Bible does not engage us in the sordid details of David's seduction but there is here a shadow cast over his family and this will return to haunt him. *2Sa 13:1 And it came to pass after this, that Absalom the son of David had a fair sister, whose name was Tamar; and Amnon the son of David loved her. 2Sa 13:2 And Amnon was so vexed, that he fell sick for his sister Tamar; for she was a*

virgin; and Amnon thought it hard for him to do any thing to her. James warns us of the dangers of lust, *Jas 1:14 But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Jas 1:15 Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.* That was true for David and Amnon.

If David had taken a strong line with Amnon, perhaps he would not have fallen victim to a revenge attack. However because David had committed a similar sin, he was in no position to lecture Amnon. Was it this event that started Absalom on a collision course with his father King David?

You will find that there are two sins that the early church had to fight against as it went into the pagan gentile world and culture. Idolatry and its associated practices and fornication (πορνεία = porneia). The word is brought into our language in the form pornography. *Act 15:20 But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood.* Fornication is at the top of the lists of works of the flesh for good reason, *Eph 5:3 But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints;* Fornication is a sin that defiles marriage.

Bathsheba is never implicated in this action by David. Perhaps we might take it as far as to suggest that it was rape. Nathan's rebuke suggests that Bathsheba was taken by force. *2Sa 12:1 And the LORD sent Nathan unto David. And he came unto him, and said unto him, There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor. 2Sa 12:2 The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds: 2Sa 12:3 But the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter. 2Sa 12:4 And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; **but took the poor man's lamb,** and dressed it for the man that was come to him.*

Like Jesus, Bathsheba was led like a lamb to the slaughter. Would it be wrong for her to portray a type of Christ? Nowhere else in God's Word is another person other than Christ that is identified as a sheep. Bathsheba too keeps silence and there is no condemnation of Bathsheba by the Prophet. She is no Jezebel or Delilah. David was the villain. *2Sa 12:7 And Nathan said to David, **Thou art the man.** Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul; 2Sa 12:8 And I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things. 2Sa 12:9 Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in his sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon.* David's guilt is plain and he confesses it.

The problem with 'infamy' is that it sticks even if you are innocent. People say that there is 'no smoke without fire'. Sinful humanity likes a dirty story and that is why bad news is good news for the gossip columnists and those gossips in the churches too. We like a dirty story because it paints us in a better light. We become the Pharisee who exclaims, "I thank thee that I am not as other men". Why can we believers not defend her? I believe that Bathsheba was innocent and I think that we should remember her for the great things that she did. That is why we shall move away from this and look at her role as 'King maker'.

The King that we speak of is Solomon (שְׁלֹמֹה = shelômôh) or Jedidiah as he was also known. *2Sa 12:24 Then David consoled his wife Bathsheba. He went in and had sex with her, and she bore a son whom he named Solomon. The LORD loved him, 2Sa 12:25 and sent a message written by Nathan the prophet to call his name Jedidiah (יְדִידְיָא = yedîydeyâ), for the Lord's sake. ISV. Jedidiah means 'The beloved of the Lord'.* David called him Solomon so why did he not keep the name the Lord gave him?

In a discussion the other week, I asked how you would describe your parents, your father or your mother. It seems that perhaps we did not know them that well when we were growing up. Of course we know what they did for us but that quality of character that defined them was perhaps less well known? Perhaps we knew them better when we grew older? Yet I wonder if we could really write even a small biography about them and the qualities that defined them. I believe that Solomon could do this about his mother.

We have a glowing character description in the 31st chapter of the book of Proverbs. There is dispute as to whether Solomon wrote this as it is attributed to one called Lemuel²¹ ('dedicated to God'). *Pro 31:1 The words of king Lemuel, the prophecy that his mother taught him.* I find it strange that a King of whom we have no other record is suddenly introduced to us? The book of Proverbs is written by Solomon, *Pro 1:1 The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel;* and I would suggest that Lemuel is another name for Solomon, just as Jedidiah was. This being so, the woman described would be his mother Bathsheba.

The early parts of Proverbs are Solomon's wisdom, a father to his 'son'. *Pro 1:8 My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother:* The wisdom that unfolds here in chapter 31 is also for the son and it is particularly for a daughter. It is in a way, the mothers wisdom to her son.

The verses are written in acrostic style. The first letter of each line starts with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet, starting with aleph (a) and ending with tau (t), 22 verses in all. *Pro 31:10 Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies. Pro 31:11 The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. Pro 31:12 She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life.* Perhaps it was written like this to help the daughters of Israel to remember the words? I am quite sure that Bathsheba was well aware of the wiles of women and she saw that with the other wives. It is a strange thing that polygamy flourished whereas polyandry did not. Perhaps women were wise enough to see that one husband was more than enough, but that to be a good wife was treasure itself, "her price is far above rubies".

I think that Bathsheba wanted her son to see this truth and be transformed by it and also the women of Israel too. Her virtues seem largely to be missing in today's society. Things that matter today are a large bosom, a huge backside, facelifts, makeup and tattoos, and the capacity to consume large amounts of alcohol. These tabloid shallow princesses disgrace womanhood, but that is what this age wants.

Bathsheba wanted to direct Solomon in the right way as regards women and I believe that it is a duty for every Christian mother to explain the nature and duties of a good woman. I never knew

²¹ The Septuagint omits the name Lemuel and just has 'king'. *1 My words have been spoken by God-- the oracular answer of a king, whom his mother instructed.*

much about women at all when I was growing up. I had no guidance except for a remark from my father to 'look at their mothers, because they will turn into their mothers'. I never even had sex education at home and it was left to grubby boys in the playground to describe and embellish the 'facts of life'. Why with so much at stake are mothers happy to let their sons make their own mistakes in some trial and error process? Perhaps a prime reason is that they were never brought up to respect women or the opinion of women? They failed to teach children to honour mother and father because they were not taught this. Honouring God just did not occur to them.

It says a lot about where Christian parents place their values. Bathsheba was a god fearing woman. *Pro 31:30 Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised. Pro 31:31 Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates.* There is nothing better than a woman who fears God. Without that godly guidance, the result for many is that marriage becomes a lottery rather than a certainty. I believe that Bathsheba wanted some certainty for Solomon and his future relationships and she saw that in a good counterpart.

It is another transformation in our lives when we start to practice and teach our own household the fear of God. People want to go and solve problems on other continents, in other Churches and in other people's lives but they seldom spend time evangelising their own family. How you ask is teaching about marriage in the family, evangelism? It is teaching about the relationship with Christ Himself. *Eph 5:23 For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Eph 5:24 Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Eph 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;*

The test for anyone who would be a minister is "How do you manage your family?" It is not a secondary condition, it is a primary condition. When Paul set up churches, he did not require a first class honours degree, he wanted a first class family. *1Ti 3:4 One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity.* I can tell you that if you cannot evangelise your own nearest and dearest, I do not believe that you will be able to do it to those remote from you. It is the 'house test' and it all comes back to the family.

How would that assessment of a minister be made? It would be made by the local church, by that I do not mean the remote congregation that people travel to and where they might meet on a Sunday. They might just know the persons name but not much more. I do not mean a pastor or some visiting minister. It is made by the believing people, in the place that they live, having seen the life of the individual firsthand. *3Jn 1:12 Everyone, including the truth itself, says good things about Demetrius. We also say good things about him, and you know that what we say is true.* GW. Everybody loved Demetrius.

You will say that in the light of Solomon's polygamy and the later apostasy due to his foreign wives, that Bathsheba failed in her task. I will answer, that she did not fail at all. If you or I preach truth and it does not bear fruit in other lives, we have at the least been obedient to the truth. Bathsheba would have failed if she had kept silent. *Eze 33:4 Then whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet, and taketh not warning; if the sword come, and take him away, his blood shall be upon his own head. Eze 33:5 He heard the sound of the trumpet, and took not warning; his blood shall be upon him. But he that taketh warning shall deliver his soul. Eze 33:6 But if the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and take any*

person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand.

Bathsheba secures the kingdom for Solomon but more than that, the Messianic legacy. *1Ki 1:11 Wherefore Nathan spake unto Bathsheba the mother of Solomon, saying, Hast thou not heard that Adonijah the son of Haggith doth reign, and David our lord knoweth it not? 1Ki 1:12 Now therefore come, let me, I pray thee, give thee counsel, that thou mayest save thine own life, and the life of thy son Solomon. 1Ki 1:13 Go and get thee in unto king David, and say unto him, Didst not thou, my lord, O king, swear unto thine handmaid, saying, Assuredly Solomon thy son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne? why then doth Adonijah reign? 1Ki 1:14 Behold, while thou yet talkest there with the king, I also will come in after thee, and confirm thy words.*



Solomon in turn honoured his mother to sit next to his throne. *1Ki 2:19 Bathsheba therefore went unto king Solomon, to speak unto him for Adonijah. And the king rose up to meet her, and bowed himself unto her, and sat down on his throne, and caused a seat to be set for the king's mother; and she sat on his right hand. 1Ki 2:20 Then she said, I desire one small petition of thee; I pray thee, say me not nay. And the king said unto her, Ask on, my mother: for I will not say thee nay. No queen mother in the Bible is given such an honour and it shows clearly that Solomon was not ashamed of her.*

A final honour that was accorded to Bathsheba was that she seems to have crowned her son. *Son 3:9 King Solomon made himself a chariot of the wood of Lebanon. Son 3:10 He made the pillars thereof of silver, the bottom thereof of gold, the covering of it of purple, the midst thereof being paved with love, for the daughters of Jerusalem. Son 3:11 Go forth, O ye daughters of Zion, and **behold king Solomon with the crown wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals**, and in the day of the gladness of his heart. Son 3:11 Go forth, O daughters of Zion, and see King Solomon with the crown with which his mother crowned him on his wedding day, even on the day of the gladness of his heart. LITV.*

Bathsheba's joy was in the success of her son. It was not for any reason of self and she could rightly crown that achievement. It was not a crown for her but a crown for him.

Bathsheba's death is never mentioned in the Bible. In one sense she never did die. She is the queen mother to many a future son who will listen to her and queen mother to many daughters who emulate her life. Bathsheba, 'daughter of the covenant', a virtuous woman, lives on.

24. What has God done for you?

When I look at the world today, it seems to me to be full of madmen (and madwomen). You only have to switch on the news to prove my point, that it is a mad world ever on the brink of its own destruction. It hates our Lord and like the madmen at Gadara cries “What have we to do with you Jesus?” We observed in our study on ‘healing’ that all men serve satan but that some are more openly governed by the evil one, to the extent that they have little or no control over themselves. This is the case of those that we find at Gadara.

Let us set the background to the story of the demonised men. Jesus and the disciples had been ministering in Capernaum on the north side of the Sea of Galilee, where we read that they had just been involved in various healings (the Centurion’s servant and Peter’s mother). They set off from the Northern shore of Galilee to sail to the southern shore a distance of around 18 kilometres in a straight line. During the voyage they encounter a terrible storm but Jesus calms the storm with a word and they arrive, shaken but unharmed to the other side of the lake.

The accounts say that they were in Gadara or the region of the Gerasenes. These differences may be due to how we explain a location. To people familiar with a country, we could define a place by naming a town, to someone less familiar, we would describe the region. For example we could say we arrived in Chelsea, or that we arrived in London and both would be true, although one might be more precise.



Mar 5:20 And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him: and all men did marvel. This says the formerly demon possessed man gave his testimony of deliverance in Decapolis, but did not we say he was a Gadarene? Decapolis means, “10 cities”, so Decapolis was a region and not a city itself, but a territory of cities, one of which was Gadara known today as Umm Qais. The other cities of the Decapolis are; Gerasa in Jordan, Scythopolis (Beth Shean), Hippos, Pella, Philadelphia (Amman in Jordan), Capitolias (Beth Ras), Canatha (Qanawat), Raphana and Damascus.

Matthew’s account tells us that they met two demoniacs, Mark and Luke’s account record one. They do not say it was ‘only’ one and there is no contradiction in their accounts. I might suggest that one of the demoniacs was possessed by ‘legion’, the other by one or fewer devils. It depends upon what point you are concentrating on in your account. We must also remember that Matthew was an accountant, so I would expect him to record details of number. Matthew also records more numerical details of the ‘colt’ Jesus rides in to Jerusalem, *Mat 21:2 Saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me.* Matthew is a blessed ‘bean counter’.

We assume that the demoniacs were Gadites in the territory of Gadara. By this time the tribes have been scattered, due to disobedience to the Torah, and many of the 10 tribes would have assimilated into the pagan peoples around them, thus living in places where ‘unclean’ pigs are raised. Before we

become too righteous about keeping pigs, we must remind ourselves that it was not unlawful to keep them. It was unlawful to touch their dead carcasses and eat them, *Deu 14:8 And the swine, because it divideth the hoof, yet cheweth not the cud, it is unclean unto you: ye shall not eat of their flesh, nor touch their dead carcase.* The Jews used horses, donkeys and camels as beasts of burden and our Lord rode upon a donkey even though it was an unclean animal. *Lev 11:3 Whatsoever parteth the hoof, and is clovenfooted, and cheweth the cud, among the beasts, that shall ye eat. Lev 11:4 Nevertheless these shall ye not eat of them that chew the cud, or of them that divide the hoof: as the camel, because he cheweth the cud, but divideth not the hoof; he is unclean unto you.*

There is a difference between keeping animals and eating them or touching their dead bodies. Keeping live pigs was not a problem, especially as they were excellent recycling machines and rubbish removers. The Romans would have had no qualms about eating them even if the Jew did not, but 'business is business', as they say.

The preliminaries aside, we now turn to the madmen. These men exhibited the unbridled anger and the malice of devils that have no constraints. This is not a singular possession, it was multiple possession, because the demons said, "we are Legion, for we are many." They live in the land of Gad and you recall Gad means troop, or we could say, a legion! As Jacob said of him, *Gen 49:19 Gad, a troop shall overcome him: but he shall overcome at the last.* One of these mad men, possibly both is as naked as Adam, stripped of all modesty. You will see that is what satan wants to do with us, debase us, expose us, ruin us, take away our senses and strip us of all sensibilities. These men were untameable, un-chainable, un-restrainable and as befits such dead souls, they lived among the dead. What a frightening place this graveyard was. The living dead, like zombies, baring all access to the road, approach Jesus and His disciples.

Are these men really much different to mankind outside of Christ? The living dead who Jesus tells, *Luk 9:60 Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.* Do they represent the rest of humanity? *Col 2:13 And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses;* Jesus delivers us from the grave both in this life and in the final resurrection. *Rev 20:6 Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.* We have in Christ partaken in the first resurrection, *Col 2:12 Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.*

What had happened in these lives to put them in such a state? The Bible spends more time in looking at how to get satan out of a persons life, than telling us how the devil got in. There is however a general statement that all unbelieving men are servants of the devil, *Eph 2:2 You followed the ways of this present world and its spiritual ruler. **This ruler continues to work in people who refuse to obey God.*** GW. However, not all men show the symptoms as openly as these men at the tombs. We may speculate that there is a spectrum of possession. The Bible never explains how people get into the state that these men did. Judas may provide an explanation, because we see that he was never a redeemed person and there came a day when satan gripped his life in a totally different way, *Joh 13:27 And after the sop Satan entered into him.*

The story of the Gadarene madman may even have been the inspiration for the story of the prodigal son. As a young man, the prodigal took his share of the inheritance and blew the lot on a dissolute

lifestyle, *Luk 15:13 "After a few days, the younger son gathered his possessions and left for a country far away from home. There he wasted everything he had on a wild lifestyle. GW. As the prodigal's life spiralled out of control, he fell in among the pigs and began to live with them. Luk 15:16 And he longed to fill his stomach from the husks which the pigs ate, but no one gave to him.*

Where would the prodigal have ended up if he had not "come to himself"? The descent into madness overtakes the soul as the mind wearied and open to all temptations and evil influences, becomes controlled by satan? A vagrant living on the streets at the mercy of people's charity. People in extremis will also do terrible things and the devil always has an offer, *Mat 4:8 Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; Mat 4:9 And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.* Being a liar, you can never trust the devil, especially if you have sold your soul to him. Perhaps that is how the madmen came to their situation. Where did these madmen get their food from? Perhaps they got it from the pig food just like the prodigal son?

Even those professing faith can be snared by the devil, *2Ti 2:25 In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; 2Ti 2:26 And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.* Perhaps this is the mystery of lawlessness that Paul speaks of, *2Th 2:7 For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.* We know satan can do nothing without the permission of God and boundaries defined by God (see Job). Whatever wickedness happens in this Universe is neither random nor meaningless, *Act 2:23 Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:* It was not a 'lucky' foresight, it was decreed by the will of God.

It would then seem that God has decreed that there will be greater satanic control over some persons than others. Some, even though they are wicked in God's eyes from birth are more constrained in the manifestation of that wickedness. Others like the evil dictators of the last and present century take great pleasure in destroying the lives of their own people, other cultures and indeed anybody who stands against them. This is satan at work in his world.

The men at the tombs may have had very ordinary lives to start with. One certainly came from a home and possibly had his own family because he is encouraged to return home. One day something terrible happened to them and they became the embodiment of unrestrainable evil and consequentially outcasts from society. That is how the world deals with what it cannot explain. Again, nothing is irredeemable for Jesus and we should not forget that.

I will also suggest that there is in this story additional symbolism. These men are like Israel, the nation that does abominations before the Lord. Isaiah says, *Isa 65:3 A people that provoketh me to anger continually to my face; that sacrificeth in gardens, and burneth incense upon altars of brick; Isa 65:4 Which remain among the graves, and lodge in the monuments, which eat swine's flesh, and broth of abominable things is in their vessels; Isa 65:5 Which say, Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou. These are a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day.*

The mission of the Messiah was not simply to rescue the elect of God, it was also to destroy the cause of the problem, the devil and his angels. *Heb 2:14 Forasmuch then as the children are*

partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; Heb 2:15 And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. The story of these madmen shows the power of Christ over satan and they knew it, “**art thou come hither to torment us before the time?**” The devils are well aware of the final outcome and it is just a matter of time.

In the light of this, we might also expect demonic desperation, and the increase in satanic activity as the end approaches *Mat 24:12 And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. Mat 24:13 But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.* Paul talks of social decline, *2Ti 3:12 Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. 2Ti 3:13 But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.* Social decline mirrors the image of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, gold at the head and clay at the feet. These things should not make the Christian downcast because they are signs that victory is near, *Luk 21:28 And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.*

This incidentally, should lead to a transformation in us, that we develop a sense of anticipation, a sense of victory and triumph, that we are ‘more than conquerors through Him who loved us’ not defeatists, fearing and dreading the end but victors now over satan.

So however these wretches got to where they were, it is clear that they are without God in their lives. If a transformation is to take place it must be radical. There is no way that they can save themselves, they have no power over the demons in their lives, no one has successfully preached to them and brought change to their lives. In our own day and age, they would be institutionalised, drugged, restrained, lobotomised and unchanged for life. Not so with Our Lord, the Transformer.

First Jesus must remove the demons. I wonder how many doctors or evangelists would diagnose that, as the first obstacle to conversion. The devils would play games with anyone to conceal their evil plans just as the vagabond exorcists in the Book of Acts must have had some credibility else they could not have practiced but when the Apostles roll up, the fraud is revealed. The devils before us recognise their nemesis straightway. This is a strange case. It is almost as if the demons are working through these men and making them a team. How did this ‘legion’ of 2000 devils speak through them? Was there a continual variation in the sounds as different devils pressed forward to speak through the men? The devils had no voice without them.

The lives of these men are transformed when they are returned to sanity. They were possessed of great strength, extremely violent and lacking control over their own bodies. In an instant they are transformed such that normal conversation becomes possible. I would expect that all Christians undergo a similar Transformation once they encounter Christ. I would expect them to become at peace in their lives, gentle, as the fruit of the Spirit is produced in them. Yet there is something else that happens. The man has faith.

*Luk 8:38 Now the man out of whom the devils were departed besought him that he might be with him: but Jesus sent him away, saying, Luk 8:39 **Return to thine own house, and shew how great things God hath done unto thee.** And he went his way, and published throughout the whole city how great things Jesus had done unto him.* I observe that he was not sent back to the local synagogue but to the community, to the city where he lived.

It occurs to me that this has an application to all Christians who would follow Jesus. What is best way that we believers can spread the word about Christ?

1. Show the changes in our lives,
2. Show the changes in the society in which we live and move.

It has been a great sadness to find that many if not most people who claim to be religious have little to ***“shew how great things God hath done unto thee”***. They have no testimony of that change that an encounter with Jesus brings and I would ask if they ever did have an encounter? *1Pe 3:15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready **always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope** that is in you with meekness and fear:* If Jesus has done anything in our lives, then we should have a ready answer, an answer in hand about that thing He has done.

What a story this man has to tell, saved from madness and degradation. His descent into madness, his possession by devils, the reality of evil, the inability to deliver himself, chained in a graveyard and how one day, in the grip of all this, a man literally sails into his life. Not an ordinary man, a man called Jesus of Nazareth, God Himself who restored his life completely. It was God who did this to him, who delivered him and forgave him. What a personal transformation. What a story to take back to his city, to where he lived. He did not need to distribute tracts, invite someone to hear somebody else talk about God, he did not need an alpha course. He had his own story and so have you and I. When someone comes up to him and says that they do not believe in the devil, he can tell them a true story from personal experience.

This is the Apostle Paul’s testimony, *Act 22:6 And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me. Act 22:7 And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? Act 22:8 And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest.* It has an effect on the hearers. *Act 22:22 And they gave him audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live.* On another occasion a different effect. *Act 26:28 Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.*

Our personal testimony, our personal witness, is a story about a transformation. It is about our encounter with God and how He transformed us. When people try and sell their religion, whether it be Evangelical Christianity, Islam, Mormonism, Russellism, whatever, they show forth a set of world views. They sell stories of the past, values that they hold to be true, beliefs that they practice but it is remote from its origins. Christianity was founded 2000 years ago. What makes it relevant today? Me. I do because I have a story today about my encounter with the living Jesus. It is very real and experiential and it is now. My experience of Jesus accords exactly with what I should expect after an encounter with Him. It is something that I can tell to those about me.

I imagine that testimonies were part of the Christian identification process, the common experience that believers shared. I reckon that if individual Christians leavened their own neighbourhoods, the Gospel would spread far more comprehensively. *Mat 5:13 Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Mat 5:14 Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Mat 5:15 Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a*

candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Mat 5:16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. That sums up personal evangelism.

The idea of 'house' Churches supports this approach perfectly. It is sad that in a road where we live, that we can have the people of God sucked away to all sorts of denominations instead of uniting to show Christ in the place where we live. It is an open show of disunity, the very thing that we are warned against. I do not see that scriptures advise that we attend a man made organisation, a denomination, rather that we be a Church where we live or at least strive to make that a reality. The Church that is **AT** Jerusalem is not the Church **OF** Jerusalem (like the Church **OF** England), the Church **AT** Antioch, the Church **AT** Corinth are all united. Churches are described by geography, not by their specific, denominational belief system. We are united in Christ where we live because Christ is in us where we live. Put a name over the door and you might as well write, "The Disunited Church of Christ"

Worshipping where we live would mean that Christians would have to get on with each other and sort differences out Biblically, instead of avoiding the challenges of belief. They would have to resolve doctrine and practice from the Bible, rather than choosing to go where they feel comfortable. It would I think make more robust believers, closer believers and shell out those false worshippers, who would be exposed by their disobedience and unbelief. If they had a problem, they could not sneak off and leave it unresolved because to do so would be a denial of their faith and the unity of the Spirit.

Not everyone is called to a ministry that might be full time, although I know many who take on a full time ministry without any evidence that God has called them or directed them to where they end up. However, there is a vast army of believers, each and every one with a testimony that they can speak, where they live and that is what we are about.

You and I do not have to move to a foreign land to witness Christ, we can do it where we live. The best way to evangelise our neighbourhoods is by living the Christian life there and showing people the Gospel through our lives and beliefs. That is what the man at Gadara was told to do, "***And he went his way, and published throughout the whole city how great things Jesus had done unto him***".

<p>Mat 8:28 And when he was come to the other side into the country of the Gergesenes, there met him two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way.</p> <p>Mat 8:29 And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?</p> <p>Mat 8:30 And there was a good way off from them an herd of many swine feeding.</p> <p>Mat 8:31 So the devils besought him, saying, If thou cast us out, suffer us to go away into the herd of swine.</p> <p>Mat 8:32 And he said unto them, Go. And when they were come out, they went into the herd of swine: and, behold, the whole herd of swine ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the waters.</p> <p>Mat 8:33 And they that kept them fled, and went their ways into the city, and told every thing, and what was befallen to the possessed of the devils.</p> <p>Mat 8:34 And, behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus: and when they saw him, they besought him that he would depart out of their coasts.</p>	<p>Mar 5:1 And they came over unto the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gadarenes.</p> <p>Mar 5:2 And when he was come out of the ship, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit,</p> <p>Mar 5:3 Who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no man could bind him, no, not with chains:</p> <p>Mar 5:4 Because that he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces: neither could any man tame him.</p> <p>Mar 5:5 And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones.</p> <p>Mar 5:6 But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped him,</p> <p>Mar 5:7 And cried with a loud voice, and said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not.</p> <p>Mar 5:8 For he said unto him, Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit.</p> <p>Mar 5:9 And he asked him, What is thy name? And he answered, saying, My name is Legion: for we are many.</p> <p>Mar 5:10 And he besought him much that he would not send them away out of the country.</p> <p>Mar 5:11 Now there was there nigh unto the mountains a great herd of swine feeding.</p> <p>Mar 5:12 And all the devils besought him, saying, Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them.</p> <p>Mar 5:13 And forthwith Jesus gave them leave. And the unclean spirits went out, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea, (they were about two thousand;) and were choked in the sea.</p> <p>Mar 5:14 And they that fed the swine fled, and told it in the city, and in the country. And they went out to see what it was that was done.</p> <p>Mar 5:15 And they come to Jesus, and see him that was possessed with the devil, and had the legion, sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid.</p> <p>Mar 5:16 And they that saw it told them how it befell to him that was possessed with the devil, and also concerning the swine.</p>	<p>Luk 8:26 And they arrived at the country of the Gadarenes, which is over against Galilee.</p> <p>Luk 8:27 And when he went forth to land, there met him out of the city a certain man, which had devils long time, and ware no clothes, neither abode in any house, but in the tombs.</p> <p>Luk 8:28 When he saw Jesus, he cried out, and fell down before him, and with a loud voice said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God most high? I beseech thee, torment me not.</p> <p>Luk 8:29 (For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For oftentimes it had caught him: and he was kept bound with chains and in fetters; and he brake the bands, and was driven of the devil into the wilderness.)</p> <p>Luk 8:30 And Jesus asked him, saying, What is thy name? And he said, Legion: because many devils were entered into him.</p> <p>Luk 8:31 And they besought him that he would not command them to go out into the deep.</p> <p>Luk 8:32 And there was there an herd of many swine feeding on the mountain: and they besought him that he would suffer them to enter into them. And he suffered them.</p> <p>Luk 8:33 Then went the devils out of the man, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the lake, and were choked.</p> <p>Luk 8:34 When they that fed them saw what was done, they fled, and went and told it in the city and in the country.</p> <p>Luk 8:35 Then they went out to see what was done; and came to Jesus, and found the man, out of whom the devils were departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid.</p> <p>Luk 8:36 They also which saw it told them by what means he that was possessed of the devils was healed.</p> <p>Luk 8:37 Then the whole multitude of the country of the Gadarenes round about besought him to depart from them; for they were taken with great fear: and he went up into the ship, and returned back again.</p> <p>Luk 8:38 Now the man out of whom the devils were departed besought him that he might be with him: but Jesus sent him away, saying, Luk 8:39 Return to thine own house, and shew how great things God hath done unto thee. And he went his way, and published throughout the whole city how great things Jesus had done unto him.</p>
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25. Encounters that Transform

The most important thing that could ever happen to a human being is that they become reconciled with their Creator. In the final analysis, the content of our lives will be rendered worthless without the presence of the Son of God in our lives. The transformation that brought this about is of immense importance and the eternal planning that went into each individual encounter is inestimable. We have had an encounter with the Man on the Cross. That is a story worth telling.

Much of the Bible is a composite of people's life stories, the triumphs and the tragedies. In those stories we see the grace of God as He brings people closer to Himself and to Glory. People say that scripture has been finalised but if you think about it, each of our stories is another page of the history of Christ's victory over the world. My personal testimony is no less inspired than the Apostle Paul's. My meeting with Christ was not on the Damascus road, it was on a train but does that make it any less real or relevant? Of course not. Our testimonies of grace are equally inspired, do not forget that.

I hope to convince us today that crafting our testimonies is extremely important and a valid means of evangelising people. If you look at articles in the media, you will generally be drawn to stories of people's experience and their life stories. It is why Facebook is so popular with 2 billion monthly users and that is just one social media platform. According to one study, a major reason to use social media was to "see their friends, friends profiles, wanting to learn more about those people". That is, finding out about the people our 'friends' are in contact with. This is often done without making live contact with those people because we just love looking into other people's lives. They have a story to tell and it interests us.

When I looked back over my journey with Christ, I reflect that I never heard the testimony of more than one person before I came to Christ. I did hear a lot about what you should do to become a Christian but not about how the person telling me what to do, became a Christian. It was almost as if the people telling me had no personal experience and I must wonder whether they had just accepted a set of truths, rather than a relationship with the living Saviour. I have heard and read of many testimonies since becoming a disciple and they have been inspirational and full of encouragement.

What are the elements of a personal testimony? It depends on the nature of the testimony. It may be a testimony about how Jesus came into our lives or it may be about how Jesus took us through a dark time in our lives, or how He brought us through sickness, or how we had a particularly significant spiritual experience. There are many directions in which a testimony may go but at the heart of each must be Jesus. It is not about us. I know someone who if he is asked to speak, or speak at another's funeral, will spend a deal of time talking about himself. I believe that testimonies are about our personal encounter with Jesus, which is central and the outcome of that encounter. It is about what we were, how we met and where we are going. It is a before, what happened and afterwards story.

It is often a simple story, 'I once was blind but now I see', with a profound outcome. I shall try and be creative today by imagining how people in the Bible might have put their testimony together. I am extrapolating scripture so it is an idea not necessarily true but illustrative. Just like the encounter with the blind man in John Chapter 9. How would he have told his story?

“Well, I was born blind and as you know, no one born blind ever got their sight back. I lived in a world of sound and touch and that was normal to me. I was fortunate that my parents looked after me but the only way I could make a living was to rely on charity. One day I heard this conversation as these Jews walked past. They were discussing why I was born blind and if it was my parents fault. Hello, I thought, I may be blind but I am not deaf, I can hear you talking about me. In the background I heard this man telling them that it was nothing of the sort, it was not because of our sin it was something to do with God and His glory. Then He said something really strange, He said *Joh 9:5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world*. Well, this is the strange part, I could feel that this man got close to me and I heard Him spit, then next minute He is rubbing something on my eyes. I did not know what to do. When you are blind, people often play tricks on you, pull your coat, take your money or drop something on your head.

Then I hear this voice saying, “go and wash in the pool of Siloam”. Somehow, I knew that this was no joke so up I got and went. I knew where the pool was because I often went there to get a drink and it was just downhill from where I sat. When I got there, I fumbled in the water and splashed it on my eyes. Well the mud had dried a bit by the time I got to the pool and as I rubbed my eyes, the strangest thing happened. It is hard to describe because I had no words for it. People often ask me that question, what was it like, getting your sight? I can only describe it by what I now know and it was like climbing out of a dark cellar into the sunlight. It was like walking into a different world and a different life.

Well, you would think that everyone would be happy for me at what happened, some were but not the religious people. The thing is that this man did this on the Saturday, which is special to the Jews and because they considered that what happened to me was ‘work’ they were angry. They kept asking me how He did it, and who He was and I said that He must be a Prophet. Then they went to my parents because they did not believe me and asked them and they said you go and ask him yourself. They said that because mum and dad were afraid of these Pharisees. The long and the short of it was they kept on so long about it, I said, “do you want to be one of His disciples too” and by then they were in such a rage they threw me out of the synagogue.

Strange to say, that was not the end of the matter. A bit later this man came up to me. His voice was familiar but as you understand, I had never seen His face. Then He says to me, “Do you believe on the Son of God?” I said, “I do not know who He is so that I could believe”. Then this man, who I found out was Jesus, said that He was this very person talking to me. I just fell down in front of Him and started thanking God. It was more than thanks for my sight, it was thanks because all that I had been taught about God suddenly became real and true for me. Instantly, I felt the forgiveness of my sins, and I can tell you a blind man sins just as much as a man with sight.

The Pharisees did not like what Jesus said to me. They asked if He thought they were blind too and He says to them, “If you were blind, you should have no sin: but now you say, We see; therefore your sin remains.” That is my story, the day that totally changed my life. I was blind and then I saw. I had my sins forgiven and my heart opened. I found

Peace with God because Jesus found me first and I would never have seen Him but for that.

We never knew the man's name but his story has echoed down the ages in scripture and hymns. The former blind man is an icon of the faith because of this transformation. Of course we must not expect testimonies to always be received with open arms, because with this dear brother, a lot of people were angry. The disciples too were not particularly sympathetic to his plight and were more concerned with the ethics and who had sinned to bring this blindness about. Why does God allow these things? Well, there was the answer from Jesus Himself, *Joh 9:3 Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: **but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.*** The answer was that it happened so that the Creator could show His works and everything has a purpose under heaven. God's works are transformations and if we are not transformed by an encounter with Jesus we remain blind and dead in sin.

Testimonies encourage people too, especially believers. Spurgeon wrote of the day that He finally was found by Jesus,

That happy day when I found the Saviour, and learned to cling to His dear feet, was a day never to be forgotten by me . . . I listened to the Word of God and that precious text led me to the cross of Christ. I can testify that the joy of that day was utterly indescribable. I could have leaped, I could have danced; there was no expression, however fanatical, which would have been out of keeping with the joy of that hour. Many days of Christian experience have passed since then, but there has never been one which has had the full exhilaration, the sparkling delight which that first day had.

On another occasion in scripture we read the story of a woman of the town of Sychar who just went out to fetch some water. It was another ordinary day that would end up an extraordinary day. It would also become a testimony that saved many souls.

Joh 4:28 The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and saith to the men, Joh 4:29 Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ? Joh 4:30 Then they went out of the city, and came unto him.....Joh 4:39 And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did. Joh 4:40 So when the Samaritans were come unto him, they besought him that he would tarry with them: and he abode there two days. Joh 4:41 And many more believed because of his own word; Joh 4:42 And said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.

Whatever people might concoct about this woman, she was well known and credible. When she went back into Sychar she told her story and they did not dismiss her. They listened and then they went out to see Jesus for themselves. They did not stop at what she said, they made it their own and they made Christ their own. Through that seemingly casual meeting, in the midst of the 'ordinary', with a woman going about her daily tasks, the people of Sychar met and believed in the Saviour of the World.

Then there was the story of the boy with loaves and fishes swept into an event that has come down in history. What do you think this young boy would have said of his encounter? *Joh 6:9 There is a lad*

here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many? Can you imagine his story?

“It was many years ago but I remember it like it was yesterday. I was ten years old at the time and I used to sell fish and bread to make some money for the family. Dad used to go fishing and mum was the cook. She made some tasty breads and they always sold well. On this morning a huge crowd had gathered to hear the preacher called Jesus. I had never seen such a crowd in my life and I still do not know where they came from. As far as the eye could see, there were people all straining their ear and eyes to see what this Jesus would do. They said He did miracles and some said He even raised the dead.

Business was good and I was down to my last two fish and I had five fresh barley loaves left, when one of Jesus followers came up and brought the lot. I remember that the man who paid really wanted me to give them for nothing, he looked quite mean, I think they called him Judas. I thought to myself, what are they going to do with them so I followed closely? Jesus looked at me and smiled, the sort of smile that says just watch this carefully.

He called to the crowd and asked them all to sit down in rows and that they would all get something to eat. It was a lovely day and everyone did what they were told and sat down on the grass. I do not know how He did it. I watched Him closely and after He had prayed and thanked God, He broke the loaf and suddenly it was two loaves. Slowly at first and then faster and faster. I could not believe my eyes. He kept doing this with the loaves and the fish. Everything he touched just multiplied. It was as if the loaves and the fishes were coming out of Him just like a river flowing out of a spring, except instead of water, it was fish and bread. Then it all stopped.

Afterwards, I saw them gather up twelve baskets of leftovers. As for the people, they just lay on the grass full to the brim, smiling and content. If I had not seen it with my own eyes, I would not have believed it possible but it is true and Jesus is a Prophet. But as I found out later he was more than a prophet because He changed my life. I even followed Him to the Cross where the Romans killed Him but I also saw Him again because He came back from the dead. I was among a crowd of five hundred people that saw Him and I read later that Paul had written about that in a letter to a Church (1 Cor 15).”

I wonder what happened to that boy with the loaves? Perhaps he became a powerful witness to the Gospel, perhaps he was even known to the Apostles when this event occurred?

Luke gathers the records of people who knew Jesus when he puts together his two volume epic, The Gospel of Luke and Acts of Apostles. In those accounts we read about Centurions. Have you ever wondered whether the Centurion whose servant was healed was the same present at the Cross? Could this have also been Centurion Cornelius of the ‘Italian band’? Why not, because he would have provided a wealth of eyewitness information to doctor Luke? What wonderful experiences he had.

The Centurion was probably known to Jesus when he preached in the synagogue at Capernaum, because the Roman Centurion had built it, *Luk 7:4 And when they came to Jesus, they besought him*

instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom he should do this: Luk 7:5 For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue. He was an unusual Roman, a Gentile but one who had grown to love the Jews. What a testimony this man would have had.

We were based at Caesarea which was the civilian and military capital of Iudaea and it was our supply base in the Province. It was also the official residence of the Roman procurator Antonius Felix, and prefect Pontius Pilate. Pilate preferred to live on the coast and used to travel regularly to Jerusalem where he held judgements in the Praetorium (John 18:28) and we would accompany him.

I had grown close to the Jews in my time in Judea. They were not bad people and I got on well with the fishermen who used to provide a good catch for us. We used to work around the Sea of Galilee, especially Capernaum where we had a garrison and a custom house. I liked the fish there, the Tilapia reminded me of the meals we had where I lived in Italy. I used to go to the dilapidated synagogue in Capernaum and took pity on them and had it rebuilt. I saw the teacher Jesus of Nazareth preach there a few times. He was very powerful and I heard that He cast out a devil during one meeting but I did not see that.

When my favourite servant became sick, I could see he would not last long. I have seen a lot of men on the edge of death and he was not long for this world. It just seemed natural to turn to this powerful healer Jesus and I sent to Him through the elders. Not long after as I was sitting by the bed of my servant, he opened his eyes, looked at me and just sat up. No trace of the fever remained, it just went in a flash. I was certainly taken aback. I heard later that Jesus had commended my faith but it did not go down well with the Jews. He said I had the greatest faith in Israel and after that I got some nasty looks.

It was sometime later that I had to go up to Jerusalem with Pilate to the annual Passover. There had been trouble and the Pharisees were stirring up the population. We made sure our spears and swords were extra sharp before we left for that one. Can you imagine my surprise to find that it was this same Jesus on trial for a trumped up charge brought by the priests? They were a spiteful lot and I could see that Pilate did not like them one bit. Pilate was a hard man, sometimes brutal but generally fair when it came to law. After all the wrangling, he washed his hands of the whole matter and the Jews made a choice to release a criminal and crucify Jesus. It was unfair that they humiliated Jesus and scourged Him but that was the Roman way.

I saw the whole thing. The cries of the mob, the cries of the other men crucified with Jesus and the frightening darkness that descended as Jesus died. I can tell you, I may be a veteran soldier but that was the scariest thing that ever happened in my life. It was like the end of the world. I could not help believing that this really was the Son of God.

Some years later when I was back in Caesarea praying and I had the strangest experience, a vision of an angel telling me that I should call one of Jesus' disciples who was in Joppa. Well, can you believe it, I am sure I had seen this man before in Capernaum when he was a fisherman. We did not dwell much on the past but on

something far more important. Peter told us about the meaning of Jesus ministry and that we, we Gentiles were part of it. That was a real revelation and as if to confirm it we had another remarkable experience and received the very Spirit of God. We all started babbling in other tongues like crazy people. Then to cap it all we got baptised. What a story we had to take home to our people.

How might we structure our testimony? We may start at a time when we were just like everyone else in the world. The time BC, before Christ. We were just like the people that we want to convince about Jesus. Remembering this should make us empathetic to those around us. If we are not careful, as we go on with the Lord there is a tendency to begin to dislike and hate the unsaved around us in the world. We begin to hate the sinner as well as the sinner's sin. We forget what manner of people we were, *Jas 1:23 For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: Jas 1:24 For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.* We expected compassion from the Lord and we should show the same. *Mat 18:27 Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. Mat 18:28 But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest.* Never forget where we came from.

Use a language that people can understand. You will hear religious people using their 'religious speak' which is like a coded language. We get into a habit of doing that because it is how we talk to each other. It is a bit like two techies speaking the terms they understand while the other hearers have blank looks because they have no clue what they are talking about. Consider however, that the non-believer is not familiar with the NT, especially the epistles and the terms that occur in the epistles. Do not try and be smart but try to help by using simple analogies to explain things, remembering that most people (even Christians) are not always familiar with the Bible. I do not find that Paul makes huge numbers of references to texts when He is speaking to the Gentiles.

Act 17:23 As I was going through your city and looking at the things you worship, I found an altar with the words, "To an Unknown God." You worship this God, but you don't really know him. So I want to tell you about him. Act 17:24 This God made the world and everything in it. He is Lord of heaven and earth, and he doesn't live in temples built by human hands. Act 17:25 He doesn't need help from anyone. He gives life, breath, and everything else to all people. Act 17:26 From one person God made all nations who live on earth, and he decided when and where every nation would be. CEV.

Paul clearly assesses his audience. Although he only has one message, he is quite aware that the people that he talks to are from different cultures and backgrounds. He speaks differently to the Jews than the Gentiles. He assesses what level of understanding his audience has before he addresses them. You might have a simpler testimony for children than for adults. You might vary the subject or the level of detail if you were talking to a group with specialist knowledge. The point that I am making is that we need to be flexible and understanding. We should ask who is my audience?

Beware of developing KJVirus. It is caused by a reversion to 16th century dialect and generally manifests itself in 'thees' and 'thous', especially when praying. I use the KJV for personal study but I would not hesitate to paraphrase or use a modern version if it was more helpful (and accurate) in putting a point across. What happened to you is a true story, life changing and personal so there is no need to tell it other than it is. Do not lose the focal point of your testimony, whatever you are

putting forward. 'How I became a Christian', 'How Christ saved my marriage', 'How I came back to Christ', whatever the story, it is all about Jesus.

26. Bringing up babies

We have discussed the New Birth when we looked at Nicodemus in John chapter 3. It has become synonymous with 'salvation'. 'Have you been saved?' or 'Have you been born again?' are considered by many to be the same thing. So when did this term become a popular descriptor for Christians?

The²² actual phrase, "Born Again Christian" does have a beginning. It's a qualifier, used as a reaction to the fact that a lot of nominal/cultural Christians exist, and probably had its beginnings with the Charismatic/Pentecostal movements of the early 20th Century. So what does the phrase actually mean? There is a technical answer, a practical answer, and a theological answer. First, let's review the passage from the New Testament concerning the phrase:

Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again." 4 "How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!" 5 Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. —John 3:3–5

Technically, all Christians are born again Christians, or they are not Christians. The quote from Jesus makes it clear that being "born again" (in a metaphorical sense, as Jesus tries to explain to Nicodemus) is a requirement.

Practically, some Christians felt they needed the qualifier. Because there are many nominal Christians, who identify as Christian for cultural reasons instead of reasons of actual faith, some Christians felt they needed to distinguish themselves as believers on principle rather than just heritage, habit, or culture.

Theologically, those who self-identify as Born Again Christians tend to be Charismatic Christians (Charismatic Movement). Many came to the Christian faith late in life, and thus felt the need to distinguish themselves from those born into Christian homes, some of whom, they feel, may just be going through the motions of religion, rather than living out a personal faith.

It is probably true that believers in the past, as today, see that many religious people who would label themselves Christians, are by their behaviour and response to scriptures, unbelievers. I do not even like to use the term 'Christian' these days because even those so called 'born again' people do not follow Christ. I prefer to be known as a disciple of Jesus.

We cannot however dismiss the term 'born again' because it is a biblical term used four times in the NT.

- Joh 3:3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

²² <https://www.quora.com/When-did-the-popular-Christian-religious-notion-of-being-born-again-emerge>

- Joh 3:7 Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.
- 1Pe 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,
- 1Pe 1:23 Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.

It is by analogy an experience akin to the natural birth and is called a spiritual birth, a birth under the operation of the Holy Spirit. Until this happens, man remains in his state of sin and rebellion and it is an essential part of the reconciliation with God, *Col 1:21 And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled Col 1:22 In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreproveable in his sight:*

Modern evangelism is desperate to make contact with the unsaved and it seems to be prepared to try anything to achieve its ends. Take the Alpha Course, on the face of it a nice idea. It wants to communicate: Who Is Jesus? Why Did Jesus Die? How Can I Have Faith? Why and How Do I Read the Bible? Why and How Do I Pray? How Does God Guide Us? Who Is The Holy Spirit? What Does the Holy Spirit Do? How Can I Be Filled With the Holy Spirit? How Can I Resist Evil? Does God Heal Today? What about the Church? How Can I Make the Most of the Rest of My Life? You probably would not notice much difference between that and a Jehovah's Witness Bible study, Who is God? Does God really care about me? How can I improve my marriage? How can I find happiness in life?

Now these are fine subjects in their appropriate place, but I return to consider where a man is if he is not a believer. *1Co 2:14 But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. 1Co 2:15 But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. 1Co 2:16 For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.* Re-educating a man is not regenerating a man. It is putting a patch on an old garment or new wine into old wine skins. It is the fact that a new creature is required by a new birth, then the truth can be received.

Alpha puts the cart before the horse. If you educate the natural man and he is not regenerate, and education does not make a man regenerate, you merely produce an educated sinner who may develop into a first class Pharisee. It is through the foolishness of preaching. *1 Co 1:21 For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. 1Co 1:22 For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: 1Co 1:23 But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness;* If the attendees of the Alpha Course need anything it is Christ crucified, then they can be educated. Without the new birth it is in vain.

If a man genuinely turns to Christ for forgiveness, then the Spirit will open his eyes. The new birth is the eye opener to the spiritual world, the Kingdom of Heaven. It is the first stage of our development, when we become Kingdom babies, babes in Christ. Just as when we were naturally born, we became more and more aware of the world into which we were born, the same is true in the Kingdom. In many respects, like babies, we are quite helpless. We are not born as adults, we know very little of God's word, we are spiritually immature, we need nurture and feeding. The Lord does not download the Bible into our minds when we are born again, neither does He put off our old

man (we will have to do that), neither does he sanctify us immediately and fully and hang the fruit of the Spirit upon us. Babies must grow and develop.

This is where I think much damage is done to the Gospel and the young believer. To the Gospel, because it is only half preached and the new life and its sanctification and walk are not emphasised enough. To the individual because it is considered that they are capable of developing themselves without the input of other Christians. Indeed you will have experienced the joy that people have when you become a Christian but after that you are generally left on your own. Hopefully you will pick up on things through weekly ministries and Bible studies. We seldom see a Beta Course design to develop young Christians through the early years of their new life.

I recall a criticism of the Billy Graham Crusades, which was that they sent the people who responded to a call for commitment to Christ, back to their home Churches. I am not saying that Graham did not preach Salvation in Christ but that the organisation of the Crusades lacked after care. Catholics went back to Catholic Churches, others to their liberal denomination. It was tantamount to abandonment. The very Churches that could not bring new believers to Christ were now tasked with developing their faith. The itinerant evangelists, the Billy Grahams, seemed to have no future interest in the development of the converts. It was like abandoning the baby at the hospital birthing unit, or sending them back to the care home where they had been abused, or leaving them on the streets of life to forage for themselves.

If you claim to be an evangelist, this is your duty, *Mat 28:19 Then having gone, **disciple all nations, baptizing them** into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Mat 28:20 **teaching them to observe all things, whatever I commanded you. And, behold, I am with you all the days until the completion of the age.*** Amen. LITV. I am always surprised at the short space of time between belief and baptism in the NT. People believe on Christ and immediately respond, like the 3,000 at Pentecost, Lydia and her household, the Philippian Jailer and his household, and the Ethiopian Eunuch. Why does it take so long to do this today? These new believers became disciples. What happened to the Baptisms and the Discipleship?

It is this, I would suggest, that has been a contributory factor to the weakness in the present day churches. People may look back with misty eyes at the crusades in Haringey back in the 1950's but did they produce a dynamic crop of believers to lead the Churches in the latter part of the 20th century? I think not. I was talking to a preacher the other week and he reminisced with sadness about the stagnation of the Church over the last 50 years. As we talked I asked him if he knew so-and-so, and he did. We mentioned other names and I said, "its a small world", to which he replied, "yes it is because there are so few believers".

I know someone who was at the 1954 crusade and dated their conversion from then. How was it that he could profess salvation and wait 17 years to get baptised? Was baptism an optional extra? Why did they take so long? My answer is that he had no spiritual parents. When I was saved, everyone rejoiced at that but no one said, "look, you need to join a good church that teaches the Word of God". We were encouraged to go along to the local CofE, where it was clearly evident, when we did, that the Rector and his staff were unsaved. The fact was that we were abandoned children, not deliberately, but by neglect.

Should the evangelist send his converts back into "the Church of their choice"²³?

A common practice among big name evangelists is to send new converts back into "the Church of their choice." This harmful practice can be extremely detrimental to a new believer. New converts need to be protected from church leaders who profess to be "Christian" but who deny the fundamental truths of the Word of God. How can a newborn babe in Christ be helped and stabilized in a liberal Church environment where the Bible is not believed nor taken seriously? How can little lambs be ruthlessly thrown to the wolves? Should not the new believers be warned concerning satan's ministers who appear as "ministers of righteousness" (2 Cor 11:13-15)?

Instead of being recommended to these Churches they need to be seriously warned about these Churches. We need to send converts to the "Church of God's choice." We need to carefully direct new believers to Churches that are Bible-believing, Bible-teaching and Bible-practicing, but how often do you hear a famous evangelist give this kind of specific direction?

Where would you send a new believer or what would you do with them? The new born baby will not develop properly if the Godly nurture is not there. In this respect we may take the analogy of the new birth further and into the family where the child is brought up. It has been said that "there is no such thing as bad children - only bad parents". Certainly, the results of parental neglect are quite easy to see in society. If we are to believe, *Pro 22:6 Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it*, what works in the 'natural' must surely work in the 'spiritual'?

Do you note those words, "***when he is old, he will not depart from it***"? I think that the reasons for this are to be found in the physiological structure and functioning of the brain. The brain is 'plastic'. Plasticity, or neuroplasticity, describes how our experiences reorganize neural pathways in the brain. Long lasting functional changes in the brain occur when we learn new things or memorize new information. These changes in neural connections are what we call neuroplasticity²⁴.

There are only three ways that information can move from short-term memory to long term memory: urgency, repetition, or association. Urgency, with the release of stress hormones, creates a powerful wash of chemicals that strengthens the connection between neurons or synapses. And, urgency also determines how and where the brain encodes the information into long term memory. Urgency can create a very long lasting memory—after a single exposure to a threat, the amygdala can retain that memory for an entire lifespan. However, the encoding or labelling of the event—the ability to recall or retrieve the memory can be more troublesome, and not under conscious control—so that the information gets stored with an emotional, rather than a narrative marker. I can pass by where I had my car accident and get anxious, even if I don't have a conscious memory of the event.

²³ <http://www.middletonbiblechurch.org/separate/contem.htm>

²⁴ <http://gretchenschmelzer.com/blog-1/2015/1/11/understanding-learning-and-memory-the-neuroscience-of-repetition>

Repetition is the most familiar learning tool - everyone has memorized facts or vocabulary words by repeating them, and some have improved basketball free-throw shooting or playing piano scales through practice. Repetition creates long term memory by eliciting or enacting strong chemical interactions at the synapse of your neuron (where neurons connect to other neurons). Repetition creates the strongest learning and most learning, both implicit (like tying your shoes) and explicit (multiplication tables) relies on repetition. It is also why it is so hard to make behaviour change, because the new behaviour must be repeated for so long and the old behaviour must be held in check.

What does this imply? If the information that we are given at the start of our journey is incorrect, it will be extremely difficult to unlearn because it will be wired in. When you have learned to do something badly it is hard to learn to do it correctly.

The New Testament refers to this need for early nurture, *1Pe 2:2 As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby*: New believers need to suck in the Word of God, the Bible. When I was saved no one encouraged me with a Bible. No one even said what version of the Bible I should get. Do you know what is a faithful translation of the scriptures, one that accurately reflects the underlying texts?

Back in the early 1970's there was a scandal involving Nestle, the company that makes Kit-Kat and other chocolate products. The Baby Killer report²⁵ explained how multinational milk companies like Nestle were contributing to infant illness and death in poor communities by promoting bottle feeding and discouraging breast feeding. In poor communities the artificial product could not be prepared properly. The word Peter uses which has been translated 'sincere' also means 'genuine' and 'unadulterated'. How would you know that what you are feeding a new believer is the unadulterated word? Have you made any study to check this? How would you avoid bringing up malnourished 'newborn babes'?

Paul realises that there are some very basic thing a new believer must understand before he gives them a solid diet. *1Co 3:1 And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto **babes in Christ**. 1Co 3:2 I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. 1Co 3:3 For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?*

Do you know what is 'milk' and what is 'meat'? If you do not, you cannot know what to feed a new believer. *Heb 5:12 For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be **the first principles** of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. Heb 5:13 **For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness**: for he is a babe. Heb 5:14 But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*

It is no surprise that we create problems for the new believer if we feed them milk and meat. You do not do that to babies. So what is what? We are told in the next chapter, *Heb 6:1 Therefore leaving **the principles of the doctrine of Christ**, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation*

²⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/nestle-baby-milk-scandal-food-industry-standards>

*of repentance from **dead works**, and of faith toward God, Heb 6:2 Of the doctrine of **baptisms**, and of **laying on of hands**, and of **resurrection of the dead**, and of **eternal judgment**. Heb 6:3 And this will we do, if God permit.* These teachings, these principles, these doctrines are foundational to the faith. They are given to stabilise the Christian life, to create a balance between faith and works, identifying works that are dead and lead nowhere. Baptism is an essential teaching in terms of how we view our entry into the Kingdom. Resurrection and Judgement are necessary to stabilise our faith, *2Ti 2:17 And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; 2Ti 2:18 Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some.*

I would also add from the Epistle to the Corinthians, that Paul covers other 'milk' issues, (1 Corinthians Chapters 3 to 10). *1Co 3:2 I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. 1Co 3:3 For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?* This is then expanded to include, factions and following men, divisions in the church, pride, sexual immorality, litigation against believers, principles for marriage and widowhood, idols and idolatry, the conscience, freedoms and their limits, head coverings and the Lord's Supper. It does not look much like the Alpha course does it?

How wonderful it would be if Christians got these basics firmly fixed in their lives. How much less trouble would occur in their lives and in the Church if instead of treating a new believer as an adult, we treated them, as **they** are, as a child in Christ and instilled the basics of the faith. We do not do this because discipleship has fallen out of fashion. The idea that we must go back to the classroom is alien to our thinking. We imagine that we can just walk into the Christian life with all our old ideas, behaviours, habits and customs without any need for change.

Not so, because we need to work on our mental state, *Rom 12:2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.* We need to review all our learning, ideas and prejudices, against the standard of God's Word. *2Co 5:17 Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.* A man cannot function properly unless he makes changes in his life, *Eph 4:22 That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; Eph 4:23 And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; Eph 4:24 And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.*

If we do not take these things seriously, if we assume that they happen without conscious effort, then our spiritual growth will be stunted and our lives distorted. We will become spiritual cripples and that is what I suggest has been happening over the last century. Because we have not laid proper foundations in Christian lives we do not see Christ. Despite more Christian resources being available to more Christians than in all of history, so called believers make little effort to avail themselves of them. Left to themselves, they make little effort to develop and mature.

1Co 3:10 According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. 1Co 3:11 For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. The

New Birth has consequences which if we neglect them will affect the lifetime of a believer. They become stunted.

27. Transforming to God's will.

Following on from the New Birth, I want to examine in more detail that essential transformation from death to life. Not the physical death to life but spiritual death to life. In order to understand this, we must firstly establish the condition of our soul before God. If we do not determine our true state before God, then how will we know how to approach Him and even if we can approach Him? Our personal concept of 'God' is totally irrelevant if we are ignorant about what God has said about Himself. Those people who say "I have my beliefs" are clutching at filthy rags if they are not holding Christ's garment. Indeed, we must also establish if there are records where God has stated who He is. Without that that, we must and shall remain in darkness and ignorance.

We believe that there is a record, the scriptures, which are attested to by Jesus the Messiah. These sacred writings of themselves however do not give us life. *Joh 5:39 Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. Joh 5:40 And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.* The Divine life is identified in the scriptures but scriptures do not give life, only point towards it. That life is only given through the Son of God. Further it is my belief that if Christ is in a person, then that person will gravitate towards the Scripture. This is because that is what Jesus did and His end to all arguments was, "**it is written**" and that should be enough for us. If a person does not accept Scripture, how can Christ be in him?

Because we can think, move and see the world around us, we have a notion that we are in a living state and being 'alive' physically, we might assume that we are alive spiritually. We may think that we have the ability to understand and discern spiritual things and are spiritual beings but are we? Here is a definition²⁶ of secular spirituality:

In general, it includes a sense of connection to something bigger than ourselves, and it typically involves a search for meaning in life. As such, it is a universal human experience—something that touches us all. People may describe a spiritual experience as sacred or transcendent or simply a deep sense of aliveness and interconnectedness. Some may find that their spiritual life is intricately linked to their association with a church, temple, mosque, or synagogue. Others may pray or find comfort in a personal relationship with God or a higher power. Still others seek meaning through their connections to nature or art.

This is filthy rags 'spirituality'. The Bible, to the contrary makes some very dogmatic statements about the spiritual state of a person outside of Christ, an unbeliever. It makes it quite plain that spiritual discernment is impossible. *1Co 2:12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. 1Co 2:13 Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. 1Co 2:14 But **the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*** Whatever the natural man may think of himself or his

²⁶ <https://www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/enhance-your-wellbeing/purpose/spirituality/what-spirituality>

capabilities to lay hold of the Divine, the truth is that he is incapable of receiving the things of the Spirit of God.

Why would this be? Firstly because he is at war with his Creator, *Rom 8:6 For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Rom 8:7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.* The fleshly nature of man, the person whose mind is set on the world, is an enemy of God. This can be seen clearly in the blasphemies, perverted behaviours, godlessness and rejection of Christ by the world. Natural man does not want to be subject to God's will. That means he does not want God's word in his life and he does not want Christ in his life.

Secondly, a person cannot be spiritual while being spiritually dead. *Col 2:13 And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Col 2:14 Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;* This cannot be referring to physical death but spiritual death, whereby mankind's relationship with his Creator was severed. Spiritual death is the severance of communion with God. To the natural man, the things of God are folly. That means that he sees the word of God as foolishness and lies.

Now when we speak of Physical death, it follows that the corpse is incapable of any actions whatsoever. You may sit down with a corpse and speak to it for hours but there will be no response. As Dickens describes Jacob Marley, "You will therefore permit me to repeat, emphatically, that Marley was as dead as a door-nail." Dead means lifeless and that is the spiritual state of the natural man. That is why you cannot speak intelligently about Christ to an unbeliever and why he cannot understand you. You are talking to a corpse. He must be brought to life and that can only come if the Lord gives him sight, and that is the work of the Spirit. The Alpha course in practice rejects this idea and looks to educate people into the Kingdom.

We might say that such a person is blind to the truth, *2Co 4:4 In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.* The natural man staggers through life totally blind to God's glorious Gospel because Satan has put the eyes of his mind out. Further, the natural man lives a life obedient to the directions of the devil. *Eph 2:2 Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:*

There is a description of man that is called "Total Depravity". *Rom 3:10 As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: Rom 3:11 There is none that understandeth, **there is none that seeketh after God.** Rom 3:12 They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; **there is none that doeth good, no, not one.** Rom 3:13 Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: Rom 3:14 Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: Rom 3:15 Their feet are swift to shed blood: Rom 3:16 Destruction and misery are in their ways: Rom 3:17 And the way of peace have they not known: Rom 3:18 **There is no fear of God before their eyes.** Total depravity does not mean that man is as bad as he could be in every area of his life but that every area of his life is affected by the Fall to a greater or lesser degree.*

How is it then possible for a sinner to exercise any will to change. He does not want to, the devil will not let him, he hates God, he has no fear of God, no love for God, no desire for God and he is dead in his sins. If I may use an analogy, he is as dead and stinking as Lazarus in his tomb. I believe that Lazarus' death was for that purpose of teaching this truth and the truth that **Christ alone gives life**, not just physical life but spiritual life.

The raising of Lazarus is another proof that Jesus has the power over death, although we should not need another proof. It naturally follows and this should be quite obvious to us, since Jesus is the Creator Jehovah. *Joh 1:3 All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.* If Jesus can create life, He can bring it back from the dead and that is not in dispute.

Lazarus is dead. No amount of shouting at Lazarus will make his ears work. His brain is not functioning it is dead, his heart has stopped, his blood has coagulated and congealed, his body is decomposing as his bacteria work their own miracle and he is wrapped in bandages. How on earth can he be expected to respond to the voice of anyone? Some radical changes must occur because Lazarus cannot possibly bring it about himself. He must be "quickened" to use a Biblical phrase. Life must flow back into him. His heart must beat, his limbs work, his eyes open. *Joh 11:43 And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth.*

The raising of Lazarus is not about Lazarus, it is about Jesus. *Joh 11:40 Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God? Joh 11:41 Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. Joh 11:42 And I knew that thou hearest me always: **but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me.*** It was neither here nor there, whether it was Lazarus, Juda ben Simeon, or Judith bat Heber, because the dead could contribute nothing other than an appearance at the door of the tomb. It was about showing that Jesus brings life, Jesus raises the dead and that we too will partake in this.

If Jesus raises the physical dead it is also true that He raises the spiritual dead. He will call the spiritually dead to life. To do this Jesus makes a person aware of his condition before God. His eyes must be opened. I would call this regeneration, and as we have seen, *Joh 3:3 Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.* It takes a work of the Spirit of God to make a person see the Kingdom of God but before you get carried away with the idea that all life's problems are solved, I will suggest that it is just part of the transition.

I am also going to suggest that there are those who are still born, those who are 'born to die', those born mutants, and there are those who are 'born to live'. *Mat 13:18 Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower. Mat 13:19 When any one heareth **the word of the kingdom**, and **understandeth it not**, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side.* These never live.

When the sower, the preacher, evangelist, apostle goes out to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom it will have an effect. *Mat 24:14 And **this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world** for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.* That word will not register with some as the devil takes it out of their hearts but that is a result, all be it a negative result. They are never born, or still born.

Some see the Kingdom but fall by the wayside, *Mat 13:20 But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Mat 13:21 Yet hath he **not root in himself, but dureth for a while**: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended. Mat 13:22 He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, **choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful**.* A modern translation puts it this way, *Mat 13:20 The seed planted on rocky ground is the person who hears the word and accepts it at once with joy. Mat 13:21 Since he doesn't have any root, he lasts only a little while. When suffering or persecution comes along because of the word, he immediately falls from faith. Mat 13:22 The seed planted among thornbushes is another person who hears the word. But the worries of life and the deceitful pleasures of riches choke the word so that it can't produce anything.* GW.

My suggestion is that there are those who have had their eyes opened to the Kingdom but wither and die. I have seen this with my own eyes a number of times. The ones that wither and die may show some signs of religion, they may for example show repentance, they may even get baptised and become church members but one day it evaporates into nothing.

The ones that wither and die may show some appearance of conversion. Conversion is a word used to describe a turn made in our lives. Turning from sin, and turning to Christ. *Act 3:19 Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; Act 3:20 And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you:* If these people who wither and die had made a directional change in their lives, a turning, then it did not last. They saw what was required but had no heart for it.

Perhaps this is the group referred to in the letter to the Hebrews, *Heb 6:4 **For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, Heb 6:5 And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, Heb 6:6 If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.*** We must understand that although God may enlighten some people concerning His Kingdom, it does not follow that they will be eternally committed followers of the King. It does not surprise me that this is the case, especially when people are not given the complete truth about the Gospel.

Then there are those who have their eyes open and thrive, *Mat 13:23 But the seed planted on good ground is the person **who hears and understands the word**. This type produces crops. They produce one hundred, sixty, or thirty times as much as was planted.* GW.

It seems to me that the Gospel is often put in such a manner, that if you step up to an altar rail, eternal life will ever be yours. No failures, false starts or apostasies. That little walk to the front of the church however, will not make the long walk to glory unnecessary. I believe that because we are selling the Gospel short there is a high rate of apostasy. Studies have shown that only 6% of people who “come forward” at an evangelistic crusade are any different in their beliefs or behaviour one year later.

There is nothing about the cost of discipleship, *Luk 9:23 And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. Luk 9:24 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.* Luk

9:25 For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away? Why is there nothing about the cost in today's modern gospel? It is because we do not want to deter people. A false conversion leads nowhere. *Joh 6:65 And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father. Joh 6:66 **From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.** Joh 6:67 Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Joh 6:68 Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.*

We have a modern Gospel that starts with a message that God loves all unbelievers, despite their sin and in their sin. A universal love. Yet think this, what happens to that supposed 'love', in that very instant when a man misguidedly steps in front of a bus and immediately enters hell. Did God love you? Were the people right to say God loved you when you died in sin, because you chose to believe a lie? No, it was because they gave you half of the message. *Joh 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. Joh 3:17 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. Joh 3:18 He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not **is condemned already**, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.*

As believers we must recognise that the sovereignty of God IN the process of Salvation, leads into the application of Sovereignty OVER our lives. We must acknowledge another great truth that God chooses His people. He elects them and then He sanctifies them. *1Pe 1:2 Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.* Now some people have a rather stupid notion that 'foreknowledge', literally 'prognosis', means that God saw who would believe and chose them. If that were the case, which I do not believe, somehow they managed to get themselves into a state whereby they believed and that God had no option but to choose them as a result of their own actions. It would also suggest that God is constrained by time, in order to see into a future not yet before Him. That is not true because we cannot work ourselves into favour.

It was because God chose us in eternity, before the Earth was formed, we being His elect, that He foreknew us. We are foreknown because we have been chosen. That would also issue in the complete redemption of the elect, *"through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ"* Paul puts it like this, *Eph 1:4 According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:*

I do not expect unbelievers to accept this teaching as it violates their concept of absolute free will. It is also my experience that many, perhaps most Christians do not accept this teaching either. There may be a number of reasons for this. Again, at the root is the idea that it invalidates the hope that we are free to choose or reject Christ. The idea holds that we have the ability to resist, or not, the will of God, and that we can make genuine, free, unbiased, uninfluenced choices. This idea is sinful because it is rebellious and ill-informed. It also suggests, that if we do not have free will, God is wrong to find fault with us when we sin.

Rom 9:19 Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Rom 9:20 Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to

him that formed it, **Why hast thou made me thus?** Rom 9:21 Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?

We learn a lesson from this that the Creator is far more powerful than we had ever conceived, even if we cannot understand it. It is a fact. Can you be a Christian and not accept this truth? To believe so would bring into question the nature of the God that you believed. A 'god' who is not in control of his Creation. There could never be such a thing as a "sure word of Prophecy", because in such a Universe, nothing would be certain.

But we go further because the Bible teaches us that we should not desire free will, a will that is outside of the purpose of God, a will that could or would disobey. That was what the devil encouraged and that is what brought sin and death to humanity. Christianity is about laying our life and desires at the feet of Christ. We must learn the lesson of Service that our Lord taught us. *Joh 5:30 I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.*

The person who does not accept this attitude shown by Jesus, is saying in effect, 'I seek my own will, not the will of the heavenly Father'. 'I want to be a Christian who can take the credit for my believing, my devotion, my holiness, my faith and my fruit'. You may, but you will also take responsibility for failing to achieve that.

Perhaps the greatest danger to the Christian today is to think that he can live a life outside of the Will of God. That in working out his Salvation, he can do so without the guiding hand of God. *Php 2:12 Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. Php 2:13 For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.*

If we cannot sense the presence of God IN us, we shall have weak and feeble lives. We shall be as good as dead, because it is the life of Christ in us that makes us alive to God. *Rom 6:11 Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Now does what I have put forward invalidate the preaching of the Gospel? Is it pointless to preach repentance and the remission of sin? By no means, because it is God's appointed way to call the elect into life. The sower goes forth to sow. *1Co 3:6 I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. 1Co 3:7 So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but **God that giveth the increase.** 1Co 3:8 Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. 1Co 3:9 For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building.*

We are not responsible for the results of the Gospel if we have been honest in our presentation of that Gospel, because it is "**God that giveth the increase**". Do not worry, because salvation rests not in your labours but in the eternal purpose of the Lord.

We have today considered a major transformation in our lives. It is when we, as disciples, can submit ourselves to the Will of God. It is when we disown any concept of freewill and freedom to become servants of the living God. It is a transformation whereby a disciple can say, genuinely and honestly,

*Mat 6:10 Thy kingdom come. **Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.** If we cannot accept God's will in our lives, it will hardly become a reality on earth.*

28. Gideon to Jerub-Baal.

The transformation of the man Gideon is marked by a change in his name. The name Gideon comes from a word meaning 'to fell trees', and hence signifies a warrior. After he cuts down, fells the Altar of Baal, he becomes Jerub-Baal, the contender with Baal and a judge in Israel. As there can be no compromise with satan every Saint should become a Jerub-Baal and we shall see some important actions required in order to arrive in that position.

The principle deities that the Israelites went after in Canaan were Baal and Ashteroth²⁷. *Jdg 2:13 And they forsook the LORD, and served Baal and Ashtaroth.*

Baal and Ashtaroth were the principal god and goddess, respectively, of the Canaanite nations (Baalim and Ashtaroth were the plural forms of these names, referring to the many shrines and images in their honour). Baal was essentially associated with the sun and storms, Ashtaroth with sex and fertility. As nature gods, energized by demonic spirits, they claimed to have "evolved" out of the primeval watery chaos. The worship of both was both grossly licentious and extremely cruel. They were essentially equivalent to similar gods in other countries, all having originated at the first Babylon under Nimrod and then spread throughout the ancient world with the dispersion.

Sexual immorality marked these religions and Israel embraced them with open arms. The consequence is an accelerated decline in morality as God compounds the sin. Sexual corruption does not cause godlessness, it is a consequence of godlessness. *Rom 1:23 And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Rom 1:24 Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves:* If there is one thing that marks our world today it is permissiveness. The Millennial generation (variously called, Generation Y, Digital Natives, Generation Me, Generation Rent and Echo Boomers, the Mosaic generation) are more sexually liberal compared to past generations, embracing homosexuality and lesbianism as normal. They are also less likely to have any religious belief.

So what is my point? It is, that not much has changed in 4000 years. It is the same 'wash and rinse' cycle that continues from generation to generation. It is not just that society in general adopts these attitudes, because we might expect that from the unbeliever. The real problem is that the Church starts to adopt them as 'normal' and that causes the Churches to decline. The lamp has gone out and the salt has lost its savour.

The period of the Judges of Israel begins when Israel enters the promised land of Canaan. Apostasy followed swiftly upon the demise of the generation that came out of Egypt. *Jdg 2:8 And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, being an hundred and ten years old. Jdg 2:9 And they buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnathheres, in the mount of Ephraim, on the north side of the hill Gaash. Jdg 2:10 And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and **there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he***

²⁷ <http://www.icr.org/books/defenders/1288>

had done for Israel. Jdg 2:11 And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim:

The history of Israel appears to be cyclic, up and down and up. The second generation, following a seemingly faithful generation, appear to travel a similar path throughout the history of the Church. Children of believing parents, second generations, do not have the same drive and enthusiasm for the things of God. I have seen this in most Christian families in my generation, with very few children taking anything other than a passing interest, even though they are not outwardly against the faith. It is not my purpose here to explain this or apportion blame but merely to point out that what happened in Joshua's day has happened ever since.

The consequences, however are a different matter altogether. The consequences for the second generation were swift judgements, *Jdg 2:14 And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies. Jdg 2:15 Whithersoever they went out, the hand of the LORD was against them for evil, as the LORD had said, and as the LORD had sworn unto them: and they were greatly distressed.*

It was against this background that the Lord set up the Judges. *Jdg 2:16 Nevertheless the LORD raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them. Jdg 2:17 And yet they would not hearken unto their judges, but they went a whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves unto them: they turned quickly out of the way which their fathers walked in, obeying the commandments of the LORD; but they did not so. Jdg 2:18 And when the LORD raised them up judges, then the LORD was with the judge, and **delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge:** for it repented the LORD because of their groanings by reason of them that oppressed them and vexed them. Jdg 2:19 And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they returned, and corrupted themselves more than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them, and to bow down unto them; they ceased not from their own doings, nor from their stubborn way. Jdg 2:20 And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel; and he said, Because that this people hath transgressed my covenant which I commanded their fathers, and have not hearkened unto my voice; Jdg 2:21 I also will not henceforth drive out any from before them of the nations which Joshua left when he died: Jdg 2:22 **That through them I may prove Israel, whether they will keep the way of the LORD to walk therein, as their fathers did keep it, or not.** Jdg 2:23 Therefore the LORD left those nations, without driving them out hastily; neither delivered he them into the hand of Joshua.*

The Judge had a Messianic role. He was the deliverer of the people from their enemies, the leader of the people and the advocate of the people. The Judge stood as God's representative in the community. On a number of occasions we see that this period of deliverance lasted forty years, generally the lifespan of the generation that were delivered, forty being a number often associated with a trial or test (Forty days in the wilderness for Jesus).

Thus the history of Israel during the time of the Judges is punctuated with Apostasy and Revival. Society oscillates between sin and righteousness, revealing in some measure the shallowness of faith. How soon God is forgotten. I can remember a time when on particular days, Easter, Ascension, Christmas, that the BBC used to broadcast a hymn before the morning news broadcast. Christian programmes were daily features. There was a morality based upon scripture. Sundays were sacred

and days when people could enjoy peace and quiet. Religion was part of our lives and yet within a generation it is forgotten. It is all so easily displaced but it is not so easily regained as we see when we read the book of Judges.

Do you want a reason for this? *Jdg 4:1 And the children of Israel again did evil in the eyes of the Lord when Ehud was dead.* When men do evil, it is because they have discarded the Word of God as their rule for living. This neglect has come down throughout the history of the Church and we are without excuse. Men want the easy communication with God, God coming to them and telling them what to do because they are too lazy to search the scriptures. I believe that this generation will have the greatest condemnation in history, because we all had more access to information on the things of God than any other generation in history. We all had access but we make so little use of it because ignorance has become a virtue and feelings are placed above revelation.

What should the Church do in our day to fight against this liberalism? There are lessons from the life of Gideon (Judges chapter 6 ff). I see three important things that will transform us and the Church. Firstly we must **cry to the Lord**, *Jdg 6:7 And it came to pass, **when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD** because of the Midianites, Jdg 6:8 That **the LORD sent a prophet** unto the children of Israel, which said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you forth out of the house of bondage;* If we are content with this present evil world and the sad state of believers in it, we shall not bother. Nothing less than revival will begin the change and that starts with you and me. Do we want to see the Lord triumphing in our nation and particularly in our Churches? If we do it will become our daily, morning and evening cry to the Lord and as James reminds us, effectual fervent prayers of righteous people can prevail.

Secondly, we need the **human resources**. Men and women of God, but chosen by God not man. I remind you that Deborah was a Judge too. We need the Prophet, the Apostle, The Evangelist, The Pastor and The Teacher, especially the Evangelists. We have no need of the mealy mouthed, feel good, self-congratulatory words of men who called themselves to the ministry. We have no need of people who have no vision. We need men who are called, gifted, know it and show it. We need the Gideon's, the Barak's, the Samson's and the Jephtah's, the Judges of Israel to be raised again. What can you do? Pray as you will for revival and for the leaders of the revival, some who may only be children among us today. Pray for them that they will grow in faith.

Thirdly and importantly, pray for **the word of God** to have free reign, *2Th 3:1 Finally, brethren, pray for us, **that the word of the Lord may have free course**, and be glorified, even as it is with you: 2Th 3:2 And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith.* We need to see Christian's gripped by the word of God. That this becomes the touchstone, the criteria by which we judge all deeds and actions. That the Church may desire to imitate Christ and in this respect be governed by God's word. If we are, it will have a consequence and that is, we will begin to challenge and undermine the empty beliefs of the world. We shall become iconoclasts and altar breakers. We shall destroy the very fabric of sinful beliefs. This is what Gideon does when he breaks the altar of Baal.

I must point out also that this altar was owned by Gideon's father, *Jdg 6:25 And it happened on that night, Jehovah said to him, Take your father's bull, and the second bull of seven years; and you shall throw down the altar of Baal which belongs to your father, and you shall cut down the pillar beside it.*

Gideon had been brought up in an idolatrous home, a home where religion was a false compromise. The road to revival was by way of destroying the foundations of evil.

Jdg 6:28 And when the men of the city arose early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal was cast down, and the grove was cut down that was by it, and the second bullock was offered upon the altar that was built. It became a rallying point for the Israelites. Jdg 6:31 And Joash said to all that stood against him, You, will you contend for Baal? Or you, will you save him? He who contends for him shall be killed by the morning. If he is a god, let him contend for himself, because one has smashed his altar. Jdg 6:32 And on that day he called him Jerubbaal, saying, Let Baal contend against him, because he has smashed his altar.

We Christians should all be dismantling the ideas, beliefs, thoughts of the ungodly that they rely upon. Paul calls it pulling down strongholds, *2Co 10:4 (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)* *2Co 10:5 Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;* That is not the task for a chosen few, it is the duty of all Christians. Passivity and ignorance in our beliefs has got us to one of the lowest points in the history of the Christian Church. My opinion is that the Church does not believe it is in a spiritual battle and if it did it is too ignorant to fight with any competence.

There is a further lesson for us and it is that Gideon did not remove the altar of Baal and leave a void. He was not someone who went around just knocking down everything in his path. He built upon the cleared space a new altar to the Lord. Voids will refill with something or other and so it is our duty to fill them with something godly. A house swept of devils can become a house that accommodates more and even worse devils, as Jesus observed. You may disagree with the sexual morality of our day, the fornication, the homosexuality, the pornography, the sins of the modern Canaanites but what, I ask, are you going to establish in its place. You are right to condemn the sin but what do you encourage in its place. Well, that is not my subject today but I will say, that a person who diagnoses all the ills of life and has no cures is no use to anyone. Gideon removed but he also replaced, he knocked down and rebuilt.

How many sermons have you heard where Gideon is berated for being weak in faith? He is made out to be weak and doubting of God's promise and so he seeks a sign. Why is it that we delight in trying to expose the weaknesses of our ancient brothers when there are no grounds to do so. Gideon had received his commission from none other than Jehovah Himself. *Jdg 6:21 And the Angel of Jehovah put forth the end of the staff in His hand and touched the flesh and the unleavened bread. And the fire rose up out of the rock and burned up the flesh and the unleavened bread. And the Angel of Jehovah went out of his sight. Jdg 6:22 And Gideon saw that He was the Angel of Jehovah. And Gideon said, Alas, Lord Jehovah! Because I have seen the Angel of Jehovah face to face! Jdg 6:23 And Jehovah said to him, Peace to you, fear not. You shall not die.*

We have suggested elsewhere that 'The Angel of Jehovah' is the Theophany, or Christophany, a manifestation of Christ in the Older Testament (you may wish to take this up as a study). He appeared to Moses, *Exo 3:2 And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed.Exo 3:6 Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God.* He is

declared to be the Messiah at the end of the OT. *Mal 3:1 Behold, I am sending My messenger (Angel), and He will clear the way before Me. And the Lord whom you are seeking shall suddenly come to His temple, even the Angel of the Covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He comes, says Jehovah of Hosts.* LITV.

In the light of this revelation to Gideon, for what reason would he require a further sign? He had the word confirmed by the presence of God Himself and been given a sign, *Jdg 6:16 And the LORD said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man. Jdg 6:17 And he said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, then shew me a sign that thou talkest with me.* I take the sign to be that the Angel consumed the offering, showing that what Gideon saw was not a vision or dream.

So who was Gideon's fleece for? *Jdg 6:36 Then Gideon said to God, If you are going to give Israel salvation by my hand, as you have said, Jdg 6:37 See, I will put the wool of a sheep on the grain-floor; if there is dew on the wool only, while all the earth is dry, then I will be certain that it is your purpose to give Israel salvation by my hand as you have said.* I would suggest that it was a sign for Israel, "to give Israel salvation". Of the 32,000 men that came to fight 22,000 of them were scared stiff. *Jdg 7:3 So now, let it be given out to the people that anyone who is shaking with fear is to go back from Mount Galud. So twenty-two thousand of the people went back, but there were still ten thousand.* I think that the sign was to rally a scared army. Perhaps there was a reason since they were up against an army of 135,000. *Jdg 8:10 Now Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor, and their hosts with them, about fifteen thousand men, all that were left of all the hosts of the children of the east: for there fell an hundred and twenty thousand men that drew sword.* The Lord, humanly speaking, just increased the odds.

I think that the situation is similar to the one that John the Baptist found himself in. John knew who Jesus was. He knew from the womb, he knew from the Baptism in the Jordan so that when he sends his disciples to Jesus, he knew the answer to his question. *Mat 11:2 Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, Mat 11:3 And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? Mat 11:4 Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see:Mat 11:7 And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?*

Gideon was a man of faith. *Heb 11:32 What more am I to say? For there would not be time to give the stories of Gideon, Barak, Samson, and Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets: Heb 11:33 Who through faith overcame kingdoms, did righteousness, got their reward, kept the mouths of lions shut, Heb 11:34 Put out the power of fire, got safely away from the edge of the sword, were made strong when they had been feeble, became full of power in war, and put to flight the armies of the nations.*

Now there is another lesson we must learn. How many men does it take to overcome any enemy? It takes God. *Jdg 7:2 And the Lord said to Gideon, So great is the number of your people, that if I give the Midianites into their hands they will be uplifted in pride over me and will say, I myself have been my saviour.....Jdg 7:7 And the LORD said unto Gideon, By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand: and let all the other people go every man unto his place.*

The chosen 300 were 'dogs', at least that is the way that they drank. Did this story run through Paul's mind when he wrote, *1Co 1:27 But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; 1Co 1:28 And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: 1Co 1:29 That no flesh should glory in his presence.*

There is one more thing we must note in this story. The weapons of their warfare were trumpets and torches not swords. *Jdg 7:20 And the three companies blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers, and held the **lamps in their left hands**, and the **trumpets in their right hands** to blow withal: and they cried, The sword of the LORD, and of Gideon. Jdg 7:21 And they stood every man in his place round about the camp: and all the host ran, and cried, and fled. Jdg 7:22 And the three hundred blew the trumpets, and the LORD set every man's sword against his fellow, even throughout all the host: and the host fled to Bethshittah in Zererath, and to the border of Abelmeholah, unto Tabbath. God confused the Midianites and they killed each other.*

We, like Gideon are in a battle and the odds are clearly in our favour. *Mat 16:18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.* We are or should be, knocking on the gates of Hades! It is not about numbers, it is about 'God with us' and if the history of Scripture repeats itself, it is always about a few good men not vast numbers, because that gives the Lord the glory. *2Co 4:7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.*

The weapons that the Lord has chosen for us are not human weapons. *2Co 10:3 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: 2Co 10:4 (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) 2Co 10:5 Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;*

Gideon transforms into a contender against Baal, Jerub-Baal. In doing so, he became a 'contender' for the faith. He was no longer a passive worshipper, a secret disciple, a back row observer. He was in the front row fighting for the faith. That is where all Christians should be. *Jud 1:3 Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, **and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith** which was once delivered unto the saints. Jud 1:4 For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.*

My prayer for the Church in these days is that the Lord will send the 'Midianites' and that He will wake up His lazy and slothful servants to see that their heritage really is under attack, that the Lord will first greatly discomfort us that we will in turn be moved to discomfort the 'principalities'. That the Lord will take us all out of our comfort zones and make us stand up for what we say that we believe. That we will not be bowed or submissive to the ungodly who would silence our voice but that we would learn to speak with boldness whatever the consequences. In short that the Lord would revive us before it is too late.

Do you fear the consequences of my prayer or do you welcome it?

29. Samson, a warning from history.

Samson had a supernatural life from the word go, however, the transition that we shall examine is in a sense negative. It is what happens when we reject or resist the Spirit in our lives and we shall ask whether or not we can recover?

Samson is born during the time of the Judges of Israel to a family of the tribe of Dan. As is often the case in the scripture, the Lord withholds children until His perfect time. As a result Samson is born to an unnamed woman and is another one of those miracle babies, like Samuel and John the Baptist. His purpose in life was outlined by an angel before he was born, *Jdg 13:3 And the angel of the LORD appeared unto the woman, and said unto her, Behold now, thou art barren, and bearest not: but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son. Jdg 13:4 Now therefore beware, I pray thee, and drink not wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing: Jdg 13:5 For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head: for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb: **and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.***

Technologically, the Israelites were outclassed. *Jdg 1:19 And the LORD was with Judah; and he drave out the inhabitants of the mountain; but could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron.....Jdg 4:2 And the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, that reigned in Hazor; the captain of whose host was Sisera, which dwelt in Harosheth of the Gentiles. Jdg 4:3 And the children of Israel cried unto the LORD: for **he had nine hundred chariots of iron**; and twenty years he mightily oppressed the children of Israel. Jdg 4:4 And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time.*

The Philistines had also taken control of weapons, perhaps why Samson uses an ass's jawbone. *1Sa 13:19 Now **there was no smith found throughout all the land of Israel**: for the Philistines said, Lest the Hebrews make them swords or spears: 1Sa 13:20 But all the Israelites went down to the Philistines, to sharpen every man his share, and his coulter, and his axe, and his mattock. 1Sa 13:21 Yet they had a file for the mattocks, and for the coulters, and for the forks, and for the axes, and to sharpen the goads. 1Sa 13:22 So it came to pass in the day of battle, that there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people that were with Saul and Jonathan: but with Saul and with Jonathan his son was there found.*

Is there a spiritual lesson for us in that story? Who is in charge of our weapons, us or the Philistines? Can we make and maintain a sword or are we always obliged to someone else to equip us? Are we reliant upon the ungodly to set our agenda or do we set it ourselves? The 'whole armour of God' the panoply 'Pan hoplos'), is a reference to the Hoplite soldiers of Greece. Each and every one of them provided their own armour. It was common sense to get the best because their lives depended upon it. I think that we shall also find that the weakest 'christians' are the people who have made the least investment in the armour of God and do not know how to fight.

The child is named Samson or 'Sunshine' and his purpose is to deliver Israel from the Philistines. He will become a killing machine in the hands of the Lord. There is a further caveat, that he must be a Nazarite. Anyone in Israel could become a Nazarite by a voluntary vow. *Num 6:2 Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When either **man or woman** shall separate themselves to vow a vow of a Nazarite, to separate themselves unto the LORD: Num 6:3 He shall separate himself from wine and strong drink, and shall drink no vinegar of wine, or vinegar of strong drink, neither shall he*

drink any liquor of grapes, nor eat moist grapes, or dried. Num 6:4 All the days of his separation shall he eat nothing that is made of the vine tree, from the kernels even to the husk. Num 6:5 All the days of the vow of his separation there shall no razor come upon his head: until the days be fulfilled, in the which he separateth himself unto the LORD, he shall be holy, and shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow. Num 6:6 All the days that he separateth himself unto the LORD he shall come at no dead body.

The idea of the “Nazarite” may be seen also in the Land Sabbath. *Lev 25:3 Six years thou shalt sow thy field, and six years thou shalt prune thy vineyard, and gather in the fruit thereof; Lev 25:4 But in the seventh year shall be a sabbath of rest unto the land, a sabbath for the LORD: thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard. Lev 25:5 That which groweth of its own accord of thy harvest thou shalt not reap, neither gather the grapes of thy vine undressed (נָזַר = nâzir): for it is a year of rest unto the land.* The vine that was to be left unpruned in the 7th year grew for the Lord alone.

The Nazarite was a person who dedicated their physical growth to the Lord just like the vine. It reminds us that we too must lead lives consecrated to Christ and for us it is not an option. If we have entered the Sabbath, the ‘rest’ of Christ, we too must grow for Him. The Nazarite’s hair became part of that sacrifice, *Num 6:18 And the Nazarite shall shave the head of his separation at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and shall take the hair of the head of his separation, and put it in the fire which is under the sacrifice of the peace offerings. However, Samson, like Samuel was a perpetual Nazarite, Jdg 13:7 But he said unto me, Behold, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and now drink no wine nor strong drink, neither eat any unclean thing: for the child shall be a Nazarite to God from the womb to the day of his death.*

Samson, Sunshine, was special by conception and special by dedication. Yet being a Nazarite was, I think, not essential to his task as a deliverer but it was essential to his relationship with God. It became a test of obedience as we shall see when he meets Delilah. In fact, Samson’s big problem in life is ‘women’. It all starts when he sees a woman of Timnath. That is the town where Judah was seduced by Tamar. Samson, perhaps because it was the custom, asks his parents to get the woman for him as a wife. *Jdg 14:3 Then his father and his mother said unto him, Is there never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all my people, that thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines? And Samson said unto his father, Get her for me; for she pleaseth me well. Jdg 14:4 But his father and his mother knew not that it was of the LORD, that he sought an occasion against the Philistines: for at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel.*

The parent’s acquiesce to their son’s desires and make the arrangements however, what they do not know that it was ordered by Providence as an opportunity to strike the Philistines. So, we have three things at work here, Samson’s overblown testosterone encouraging sin, the parent’s pandering to a sinful request by their only son and the overriding purpose of God. How does that work out in terms of personal responsibility and accountability? Does it absolve Samson and his parents of their responsibilities to the Lord because the Lord has a greater purpose?

We might argue that they acted in ignorance and that it was not a wilful action. The ignorant parents helped their ignorant son get unequally yoked. Yet, even if it is out of their control, they are still accountable. *Rom 9:18 Everything depends on what God decides to do, and he can either have pity on people or make them stubborn. Rom 9:19 Someone may ask, "How can God blame us, if he makes us behave in the way he wants us to?" Rom 9:20 But, my friend, I ask, "Who do you think you are to*

question God? Does the clay have the right to ask the potter why he shaped it the way he did? Rom 9:21 **Doesn't a potter have the right to make a fancy bowl and a plain bowl out of the same lump of clay?**" CEV. The answer must be that God can do what He wants and still hold us morally accountable. However, we must say that if that is the case with the elect, their sin, all of their sin is covered by the blood of Christ.

The story of Samson is certainly an epic tale and the stuff of Movies but pause to think for a moment. Was this the only way that the Lord could deal with the Philistines? Could not Samson have grown up a righteous, honest and faithful servant of God? He needed no excuses to destroy the Philistines. Indeed it was his duty. *Deu 7:1 When the LORD thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou; Deu 7:2 And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and **utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them: Deu 7:3 Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son.** Like the sin and demons that plague our lives, there is to be no compromise, no mercy to be shown to evil. We do not need special excuses to destroy sin, it should be a way of life by now.*

Someone once said that 'there are more ways of killing a cat than stuffing it with cream'. In other words, events may be outworked in more than one way. It was all quite possible that Samson could have grown up like Joseph, an honest, God fearing, loving servant of God, a saviour of the nation. Samson is however cut out of a different mountain. He is rash, gullible, sensuous and disobedient. He is as one old saint described him, "a rough Christian". Yes, he could have lived a totally different life and the same aims achieved without the accumulated sins. Why then do we have his life running this course? It is I believe an example to us. *1Co 10:9 Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. 1Co 10:10 Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. 1Co 10:11 Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. 1Co 10:12 Wherefore **let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.***

Samson is a warning from history. He is a warning that we can do the things that God will have us do but at the same time fail to observe the standards that our Lord has set. We may still cling to the faith but that life that we live is a betrayal of all that the life stands for. It may also be that the Lord will cut that life short if we walk contrary to Him.

I love Samson as a character, yet at the same time have great sadness for him. He had so much potential but squandered it in the manner of his life. We should not see the life of Samson as successful, just because of the overriding Providence of God and that it all works out well in the end. Just because the aims seem to be achieved and the Philistines occasionally defeated, is not to Samson's credit. What crown did Samson receive, what reward did he gain from the hay, wood and stubble that piled up in his life? You cannot say that Samson was a good example to anyone as was Joseph. You cannot say that Samson's relationship with women was a godly example to the young men of Israel. Of course, like all of us we have feet of clay, but we should not use these examples as excuses for our own failures. Rahab may have lied but that is no excuse for you to lie. Samson may have gone with prostitutes but that is no excuse for us to do the same.

A lesson that we should learn is *1Th 5:22 Abstain from all appearance of evil*. We should be ever conscious of our standing before the Lord, our bearing and our conduct. Even if something we might do is not sinful, yet we must refrain from doing it if there is the slightest chance that it could be construed as evil. A good example of this is the Billy Graham 'rule', about not travelling alone with a woman other than your wife. I am sure Dr Graham is a man of high integrity and I would never have considered that he would have strayed, but he himself could see the damage it would do to his message if he were misconstrued as to his actions. He limited his own freedom.

I doubt if Samson ever considered for one second, the effect that his example had on the other young men in Israel. How that his attitude towards the Philistine women would have given them an excuse to do the same, how he would have become a perverted role model to a generation. In our own day, you can see the same thing as the youth follow the 'sacred' trash of life, in all their godless tattooed fashions and pursuits. Samson's companions were Philistines and his 'best man' was a Philistine, *Jdg 14:20 But Samson's wife was given to his companion, whom he had used as his friend*.

I am not suggesting that Samson was a man who lacked faith. Indeed he is in the pantheon of faith, *Heb 11:32 And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: Heb 11:33 Who through faith subdued kingdoms.....* What I do think is that Samson did not hold his faith in high esteem and that he compromised it with his fleshly desires. It is as if he is spiritually dull. We too should ask whether 'faith' is the governing factor in our lives or whether it is an accessory.

My suggestion is also that Samson is a warning about living an ungodly life while holding the faith. The life of Samson teaches us about the negative side of human relationships with the Lord. What we should learn in relationships is, 'where does our loyalty lie'? When we see supposed Christians launch into a relationship with the unbeliever, the ungodly person, we may rightly draw the conclusion that they love that person more than they love the Lord. They will submit to the plea to marry the unbeliever (or commit fornication with them) rather than submit to the plea of the Lord to keep them separate. *Deu 7:3 Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. Deu 7:4 For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly.* You can cobble any old excuse you like to justify your action but you cannot escape the fact that the Lord will not be neutral towards your attitude. You will have kindled the anger of the Lord. Ignorance never removes the consequences of ignorance.

Let me explain this by an example from history that came to mind as I was writing.

It is now known that at about the end of 1985 a private radiotherapy institute, The Institute Goiano de Radioterapia in Goiania, Brazil, moved to new premises, taking with it a cobalt-60 radiation unit and leaving in place a caesium-137 radiation therapy unit without notifying the licensing authority as required under the terms of the institute's licence. The former premises were subsequently partly demolished. As a result, the caesium-137 unit became totally insecure.

Two people entered the premises and, not knowing what the unit was but thinking it might have some scrap value, removed the source assembly from the radiation head of the machine. This they took home and tried to dismantle. In the attempt the source

capsule was ruptured. The radioactive source was in the form of caesium chloride salt, which is highly soluble and readily dispersible. Contamination of the environment ensued, with one result being the external irradiation and internal contamination of several persons.

Thus began one of the most serious radiological accidents ever to have occurred. After the source capsule was ruptured, the remnants of the source assembly were sold for scrap to a junkyard owner. He noticed that the source material glowed blue in the dark. Several persons were fascinated by this and over a period of days friends and relatives came and saw the phenomenon. Fragments of the source the size of rice grains were distributed to several families. This proceeded for five days, by which time a number of people were showing gastrointestinal symptoms arising from their exposure to radiation from the source.

The symptoms were not initially recognized as being due to irradiation. However, one of the persons irradiated connected the illnesses with the source capsule and took the remnants to the public health department in the city. This action began a chain of events which led to the discovery of the accident.

Many individuals incurred external and internal exposure. In total, some 112 000 persons were monitored, of whom 249 were contaminated either internally or externally. Some suffered very high internal and external contamination owing to the way they had handled the caesium chloride powder, such as daubing their skin and eating with contaminated hands, and via contamination of buildings, furnishings, fittings and utensils. A number died.

Now you may say that this was a terrible tragedy and if only someone knew about the nature and construction of radiation machines and handling radioactive material, and others being more responsible in the disposal, the accident would have been totally avoidable. Well of course it would. The point that I am making with this story is that ignorance does not absolve us from the consequences of that ignorance. God's laws function even if we are ignorant of them. Unequal yokes have consequences, even if you did it in ignorance.

Samson was naïve in his trust of ungodly women. You can never have discretion in an ungodly person, regarding the things of God and this is why. *Rom 8:7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.* It is not possible to be a friend of this world. *Jas 4:4 Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.* I will go further and say that no Christian can ever have a true friendship with an unbeliever. They are on totally different pages, in totally different worlds and they will end up eternally separated.

If you think that it is possible to live with the enemy, then I suggest that you have an imperfect view of the state of man. Even family ties will not survive, *Luk 12:53 The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.* Remember the lesson because between Palm Sunday and Good Friday, the 'Hosannas' changed to 'Kill Him'.

Another lesson in relationships is never become involved with anyone, even a supposed Christian that uses emotional blackmail. *Jdg 14:16 And Samson's wife wept before him, and said, Thou dost but hate me, and lovest me not: thou hast put forth a riddle unto the children of my people, and hast not told it me. And he said unto her, Behold, I have not told it my father nor my mother, and shall I tell it thee?* And with Delilah, *Jdg 16:15 And she said unto him, How canst thou say, I love thee, when thine heart is not with me? thou hast mocked me these three times, and hast not told me wherein thy great strength lieth.* Samson lacked discernment when it came to women and it would be the death of him.

Emotional blackmail is a control mechanism. It is the work of a manipulative person who wanted a one way relationship, all about their needs. It is a means of probing personal weaknesses and Samson was a mug for a good sob story. He may have had physical strength but he lacked strength of moral character. He should have remained resolute in the face of blackmail but he did not. What a way to start married life. First Samson marries a Philistine (that should say it all) but also that she is a manipulating Philistine. You can imagine how this relationship would have developed if it had been allowed to continue. This woman would have made more and more demands, all in the name of love. If you loved me, you would do this and this. She did not want a husband she wanted a slave. She wanted her brand of 'love' but she had no love to give and she did not even possess the loyalty of a dog!

Delilah is another paramour before who Samson scatters pearls as before a swine. His mystic bond with Jehovah was a sacred trust but Samson had become blasé about it. He could have witnessed the nature of his consecration and kept himself entirely separate from the prostitute but instead, he rolls into a compromise situation where he will be snared. He had taken both his gift and his consecration for granted. *1Co 10:11 Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. 1Co 10:12 Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.* Samson is about to become an example of a fall.

I think that Samson blunders along the road of life. He does not seem to walk with God, more stumble with God. Perhaps he has grown too confident in his own ability, after all, he has been strong from birth. Men were afraid of him and he could travel through life with impunity doing what he wanted. Perhaps like us, we become blasé about life when everything is going our way. We forget that it is by His grace that we have what we have. We trust more and more to ourselves until one day it is all ripped away from us. *Jer 17:5 Thus saith the LORD; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD. Jer 17:6 For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited.* That is where Samson is heading.

It does not seem to me that Samson wages war with the Philistines with any open direction from God. Yes, God is using him as a weapon but the occasions where Samson engages the Philistines are generally the result of some dalliance with a woman, where he is cheated and his subsequent implements revenge attacks upon them. It does not appear to be the result of any plan in Samson's life. It is the result of a testosterone filled vendettas. It was not the systematic destruction of the enemies of God and as consequence, when he finishes his life's journey, the Philistines are just as much in control as they were at the beginning. *Jdg 15:20 And he judged Israel in the days of the*

Philistines twenty years. It is however a start. *Jdg 13:5 and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.* As Churchill said, ‘Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning’. It would be left to King David to complete the task.

It seems to me that there was an uneasy truce between the Philistines and the tribes of Israel. It was so with Judah who did not want to strain their relationship with them.. *Jdg 15:11 Then three thousand men of Judah went to the top of the rock Etam, and said to Samson, Knowest thou not that the Philistines are rulers over us? what is this that thou hast done unto us? And he said unto them, As they did unto me, so have I done unto them. Jdg 15:12 And they said unto him, We are come down to bind thee, that we may deliver thee into the hand of the Philistines. And Samson said unto them, Swear unto me, that ye will not fall upon me yourselves.* As long as Israel did not disturb the peace, it could continue its religious practices under the domination of Philistia, as servants to the Philistines as long as they remained tributaries. It was an uneasy peace but Samson was a thorn in their side.

Samson paid a terrible price for the betrayal of his relationship with his God. He was blinded and humiliated by the enemy that he could so easily defeat at other times, but God’s Spirit had gone elsewhere. He had grieved the Spirit and that was the price he paid.

Samson’s death as most of the acts in his life was an act of vengeance as he commits suicide. *Jdg 16:28 And Samson called unto the LORD, and said, O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes.* In his death he killed more than in his life but what a sad end.

Many years ago I heard a sermon where the preacher spoke of our ‘potential’ in life. Samson had potential but sadly, it remained potential not actuality.

30. Ruth (God’s widow).

Rth 1:1 In the days when the judges were ruling, there was a famine in the land. A man from Bethlehem in Judah went with his wife and two sons to live for a while in the country of Moab. Rth 1:2 The man's name was Elimelech, his wife's name was Naomi, and the names of their two sons were Mahlon and Chilion. They were descendants of Ephrathah from Bethlehem in the territory of Judah. They went to the country of Moab and lived there. Rth 1:3 Now, Naomi's husband Elimelech died, and she was left alone with her two sons. Rth 1:4 Each son married a woman from Moab. One son married a woman named Orpah, and the other son married a woman named Ruth. They lived there for about ten years. Rth 1:5 Then both Mahlon and Chilion died as well. So Naomi was left alone, without her two sons or her husband. GW.

We meet Ruth in the midst of a personal tragedy.



She has become a young widow and her future wellbeing is now in doubt. Her mother-in-law Naomi advises that she returns to her people the Moabites but she is not persuaded. On the face of it, it seemed good advice because Naomi had trouble supporting herself, let alone her widowed daughter-in-law. *Rth 1:15 Naomi said, "Look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods. Go back with your sister-in-law."* GW. Yet I must question what sort of faith was present in Naomi, to encourage Ruth to go back with her sister-in-law and 'her gods'. Ruth refused.

*Rth 1:16 But Ruth answered, "Don't force me to leave you. Don't make me turn back from following you. Wherever you go, I will go, and wherever you stay, I will stay. **Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God.** Rth 1:17 Wherever you die, I will die, and I will be buried there with you. **May the LORD strike me down if anything but death separates you and me!"** Rth 1:18 When Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to go with her, she ended the conversation. GW. That is an incredible statement of loyalty. Ruth has nothing if she stays with widowed Naomi, yet if she stays with Naomi's God, she has everything.*

The loyalty was further fraught by the fact that Moabites were outcasts from Israel. Moab was the product of an incestuous relationship by Lot after he came out of Sodom. Moab, like Jacob is a descendent of Terah, but Moab was not on good terms with Israel. The Moabites had a tenuous relationship with Israel but they were not enemies. *Deu 2:8 And when we passed by from our brethren the children of Esau, which dwelt in Seir, through the way of the plain from Elath, and from Eziongaber, we turned and passed by the way of the wilderness of Moab. Deu 2:9 And the LORD said unto me, **Distress not the Moabites, neither contend with them in battle:** for I will not give thee of their land for a possession; because I have given Ar unto the children of Lot for a possession.*

Moab had become a powerful nation but during the Exodus they had resisted Israel and had not assisted them during their travels, consequently they would be punished, *Deu 23:3 An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; **even to their tenth generation** shall they not enter into the congregation of the LORD **for ever:** Deu 23:4 Because they met you not with bread and with water in the way, when ye came forth out of Egypt; and because they hired against thee Balaam the son of Beor of Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse thee. Deu 23:5 Nevertheless the LORD thy God would not hearken unto Balaam; but the LORD thy God turned the curse into a blessing unto thee, because the LORD thy God loved thee. Deu 23:6 **Thou shalt not seek their peace nor their prosperity all thy days for ever.***

This means also that no marriages were to be contracted with the Moabites. It was this sin that Ezra attempted to remove in his day at the restoration of the Temple, after the captivity in Babylon, *Ezr 9:1 Now when these things were done, the princes came to me, saying, The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, **have not separated themselves from the people of the lands**, doing according to their abominations, even of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, **the Moabites**, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. Ezr 9:2 For they have taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons: so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of those lands: yea, the hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass. Ezr 9:3 And when I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonished.* Ruth in Ezra's distant past had clearly not created a precedent that they could draw upon.

We might question why Naomi and Elimelech allowed their sons to marry the outcasts of Israel especially in the light of the prohibition in Deuteronomy. It probably reflects the spiritual declension that was endemic during the period of the Judges. We must also be careful not to claim that because something good came of all this, that it justifies the actions of Ruth, Naomi and her sons, that it paves the way to justify some modern economic migrant story, that God's law and its penalties can be rendered void if the outcome of disobedience is something good. I have heard people using that argument for marrying an unbeliever. If the person eventually becomes a Christian, then it sets a precedent that it is acceptable to have unequal yokes in marriage. It is not a hope based upon Biblical faith, it is a hope that God will ignore open rebellion. Those are dangerous precedents that undermine the truth as we saw in our study of Samson.

The Lawgiver Himself is the King of His kingdom and He can choose who He will have as part of it. How did this young Moabite then become a follower of Jehovah God of Israel? Her mother-in-law Naomi does not seem particularly loyal to the religion of her Israelite ancestors. Naomi's sons loyalties are also questioned because they went after a person whom the Law would not allow in their Congregation. *Deu 23:3 An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the LORD for ever:* What was it that brought Ruth that love for the God of Israel, the God who did not want her people?

There would have been no 'evangelical Churches' in Moab. No synagogues, no reading of the law, no sacrifices or rituals of Jewish law, no individual Bibles. It would have been a dry land in religious terms. The god of the land was Chemosh the abomination of the Moabites. The Mesha Stele (1m high basalt block circa 840BC) is inscribed with the earliest record of conflict with Israel.

I am Mesha, son of Kemosh [-yatti], the king of Moab, the Dhibanite. My father was king over Moab for thirty years, and I became king after my father. And I made this high-place for Kemosh in Qarcho . . . because he has delivered me from all kings, and because he has made me look down on all my enemies. Omri was the king of Israel, and he oppressed Moab for many days, for Kemosh was angry with his land. And his son reigned in his place; and he also said, "I will oppress Moab!" In my days he said so. But I looked down on him and on his house, and Israel has been defeated; it has been defeated forever! And Omri took possession of the whole land of Medeba, and he lived there in his days and half the days of his son: forty years. But Kemosh restored it in my days. And I built Baal-Meon, and I built a water reservoir in it. And I built Qiryaten. And the men of Gad lived in the land of Atarot from ancient times; and the king of Israel built Atarot for himself, and I fought against the city and captured it. And I killed all the people of the city as a sacrifice for Kemosh and for Moab. And I brought back the fire-hearth of his uncle from there; and I brought it before the face of Kemosh in Qerioit, and I made the men of Sharon live there, as well as the men of Maharit. And Kemosh said to me, "Go, take Nebo from Israel." And I went in the night and fought against it from daybreak until midday, and I took it and I killed the whole population: seven thousand male subjects and aliens, and female subjects, aliens, and servant girls. For I had put it to the ban for Ashtar Kemosh. And from there I took Yahweh's vessels, and I presented them before Kemosh's face.

Although these events are recorded a few centuries later, we can see that the beliefs of the Moabites are deeply held at the highest level in the nation. They had been in conflict since Israel entered Canaan, *Num 22:3 And Moab was sore afraid of the people, because they were many: and Moab was distressed because of the children of Israel. Num 22:4 And Moab said unto the elders of Midian, Now shall this company lick up all that are round about us, as the ox licketh up the grass of the field. And Balak the son of Zippor was king of the Moabites at that time.* Being a believer in Jehovah was probably something that you did not talk about if you were a sojourner in Moab.

So how did Ruth come to the Lord? I will venture the thought that the Lord drew her as He does all His people. Like that dear sister of ours in Egypt, who came to Jesus when she was led to examine her native religion in the light of the Bible and found her Saviour. She saw the falsehood in her native religion. For Ruth there was perhaps a deeper call, because in her, just as in that future daughter of Zion, Mary, was the King of the Jews. She was to be the bearer of a greater son than David. The stirrings in Ruth were the awakenings of a mother in Israel, albeit a Gentile.

Although she may be a Moabite on the outside, on the inward side Ruth was a believer in the God of Israel. She was an Israelite at heart. Ruth's response to her situation is to consolidate, to strengthen her position with regard to her commitment to her God, not to weaken it or discard it. She has found Jehovah, she will stay with Jehovah and she will die rather than be separated from her God and her family. If God would keep her out of His congregation, yet she will keep knocking on His door. She is a woman with a cause, like the widow in the Gospel. *Luk 18:2 Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: Luk 18:3 And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. Luk 18:4 And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; Luk 18:5 **Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.** Luk 18:6 And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. Luk 18:7 And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?*

God loves the widows and orphans and they are under His protection and for the Church, according to James, we have a duty towards them. I think that what we observe in Ruth's life is Grace under the first Covenant. I believe that this grace has so transformed Ruth that despite the sad circumstances of her life, she has the strength to go on. She can go on because she is going on with the Lord. As Asaph had learned, *Psa 73:24 Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Psa 73:25 Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.* Did the Lord take Ruth's first husband to deepen her relationship with Him?

Widows and widowers are vulnerable souls. The loss of a companion is the loss of a limb and it will happen to all of us. Statistically, women are far more likely to be widowed and far less likely to remarry than men. Of the approximately 13 million bereaved spouses in America today, 11 million are women and this figure is probably representative of other countries. Mortality rates also increase for the surviving partner.

It cannot be avoided but it can be anticipated ahead of time. I am not saying that it can be made painless but it can be made bearable. That is done by facing the realities of life and investing now, in

the life to come. It is rendered bearable by the relationship that we have with the Lord. If we have been more reliant upon our spouse than the Lord, our pain will be greater.

Ruth is a woman of high principles. Her heart is set upon what is right and she is prepared for the future because she has her hope in her Lord. How different to many today who thrash about in hopelessness, even those who call themselves Christians fail to hold the faith. They are vulnerable and this is one thing that can happen. Have you heard of 'catfishing'?²⁸ The practice of using a fake profile to start an online romance is known as "catfishing" and 3,889 online dating crimes were reported in the last year alone. I had not understood this term until a news item told the story of a woman who had a whirlwind romance with a man after meeting him through the dating app Tinder. But their 14-month relationship came crashing down when she discovered his profile was a fake. His name was not Antony and he was not single. In fact, he was a married dad who had initially used photos of a Bollywood actor on his profile and had lured in other women too. The woman said, "He used me like a hotel with benefits under the guise of a romantic, loving relationship **that he knew I craved.**"

Widows are extremely vulnerable and the world is always ready to exploit that. Yet what a widow needs first is not a 'good man', she needs the strength of a good God. Ruth does not start by looking for a man but turns to her God. Ruth is unwavering in her bereavement and falls upon the Rock of Ages, her sure and certain strength. I am sure that Ruth, still with many years of childbearing left to her, craved a loving relationship. There are many people who are desperate for relationships and are prepared to discount the risks when searching for 'love'. Bereavement, divorce and loneliness can make people vulnerable but that does not have to be the case and it certainly should not be the case for believers. When things go wrong in life that is no reason to ditch all of the good principles that we held to when things were going well, because we want a quick gain.

What should Christians do after the loss of a spouse? What if we were in that position of widower or widow like Ruth? How does the Bible guide us? I saw a book written by a widow, entitled "The undistracted Widow"²⁹. The author Carol Cornish who lost her husband of 38 years to lung cancer, encourages widows to use their widowhood for God's glory. She says, "Ministry to widows needs to be a priority for Christian communities". That is certainly a Biblical perspective.

Widows are to be honoured. *1Ti 5:3 Honor widows who have no families. 1Ti 5:4 The children or grandchildren of a widow must first learn to respect their own family by repaying their parents. This is pleasing in God's sight. 1Ti 5:5 A widow who has no family has placed her confidence in God by praying and asking for his help night and day. 1Ti 5:6 But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead*

²⁸ 'Catfishing' is the phenomenon of internet predators that fabricate online identities and entire social circles to trick people into emotional/romantic relationships (over a long period of time). In the film of that name, the husband, Vince, relays a story of how when live cod were shipped to Asia from North America, the fish's inactivity in their tanks resulted in only mushy flesh reaching the destination. However, fishermen found that putting catfish in the tanks with the cod kept them active, and thus ensured the quality of the fish. Vince made an analogy of how there are people in everyone's lives who keep each other active, always on their toes and always thinking, suggesting that people should always be alert while socializing through the internet.

²⁹ The Undistracted Widow: Living for God after Losing Your Husband By Carol Cornish.

<https://www.crossway.org/books/the-undistracted-widow-tpb/>

although she is still alive. 1Ti 5:7 Insist on these things so that widows will have good reputations. GW. However, there are true widows and there are wanton widows.

The Church is not to be held accountable for the support of young, able bodied widows who would be encouraged to idleness and gossip. *1Ti 5:11 **Don't include younger widows on your list. Whenever their natural desires become stronger than their devotion to Christ, they'll want to marry. 1Ti 5:12 They condemn themselves by rejecting the Christian faith, the faith they first accepted. 1Ti 5:13 At the same time, they learn to go around from house to house since they have nothing else to do. Not only this, but they also gossip and get involved in other people's business, saying things they shouldn't say. 1Ti 5:14 So I want younger widows to marry, have children, manage their homes, and not give the enemy any chance to ridicule them. 1Ti 5:15 Some of them have already turned away to follow Satan.*** GW. What we see in Ruth's life is that once she has made her commitment to the Lord, she stays with the programme. She is in Israel for the long haul, not for a short term goal.

I do not intend to go into the happy outcome of Ruth's choices but leave that to you. What I do want to leave with is a consideration of Ruth's transformation from Moabitess to Israelitess. How does Ruth transform? She must enter the covenant with Jehovah but how? Men became circumcised but what about women? Was there a ritual for them? The closest that we get to a ritual is in the case of a captive from war. *Deu 21:11 And seest among the captives a beautiful woman, and hast a desire unto her, that thou wouldest have her to thy wife; Deu 21:12 Then thou shalt bring her home to thine house; and she shall shave her head, and pare her nails; Deu 21:13 And she shall put the raiment of her captivity from off her, and shall remain in thine house, and bewail her father and her mother a full month: and after that thou shalt go in unto her, and be her husband, and she shall be thy wife.*

There is no female equivalent to circumcision. It was a male ritual, where by the male carried the 'flag', that is the sign of the covenant, in his flesh. *Gen 17:10 This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised. Gen 17:11 And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you.*

We should remind ourselves that this was only an outward 'flag' not an inward flag. You could be physically circumcised but at the same time a covenant breaker. As Paul observes, *Rom 2:28 For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: Rom 2:29 But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.*

This points us to the solution for our dilemma. The heart must be transformed by God Himself, grace abounding to the chief of sinners, *Deu 10:16 Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked..... Deu 30:5 And the LORD thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers. Deu 30:6 And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.*

Ruth, like every 'true' Jew, every Saint from Abel forward, Jew, Gentile, man, woman, slave or freeman must have the inward circumcision. *Col 2:10 And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: Col 2:11 In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Gal 3:27*

For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. Gal 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. Gal 3:29 And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Ruth was transformed by her distant relative who as yet had not been born in the flesh. Imagine that! Her descendent Jesus had come into her heart and circumcised it. I cannot explain the metaphysics of that but it must happen because Ruth had been transformed in her heart. Without that heart transformation religion is pointless but because of that transformation, Ruth can go on with her God. That is the difference between the believer and the unbeliever, the believer is enabled to go on. Ruth endures hardship and is rewarded for her faithfulness.

I thought when we sang the hymn, 'What a friend we have in Jesus' last week, could we sing, 'What a friend I am to Jesus'? Of course we want His friendship but how do we show ours to Him? The name Ruth means 'friend' and perhaps it was a Hebrew name given to her because of her character. She was a friend to Naomi but more than that she was a friend of God and a friend to God. I very much look forward to meeting her in person.

31. The Jailor (break in to break out).

Act 16:20 And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, Act 16:21 And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans. Act 16:22

And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them. Act 16:23 And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely: Act 16:24 Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks. Act 16:25 And at midnight



Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them. Act 16:26 And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed. Act 16:27 And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled. Act 16:28 But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here. Act 16:29 Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, Act 16:30 And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? Act 16:31 And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. Act 16:32 And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. Act 16:33 And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. Act 16:34 And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house. Act 16:35 And when it was day, the magistrates sent the serjeants, saying, Let those men go. Act 16:36 And the

keeper of the prison told this saying to Paul, The magistrates have sent to let you go: now therefore depart, and go in peace. Act 16:37 But Paul said unto them, They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily? nay verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out. Act 16:38 And the serjeants told these words unto the magistrates: and they feared, when they heard that they were Romans.

Philippi is located about 9 miles [14 km.] inland (north) of Neapolis (modern Kavala). It was founded in the fourth century B.C. after the battle of Philippi (Between Mark Antony and the leaders of Julius Caesar's assassination). Veterans of the Roman legions were settled there and in 27 B.C. the city became a Roman Colony. It was an important city of Macedonia, and the main highway from the east that headed towards Rome, the 493 mi. [790 km.] long Via Egnatia, ran through the city. Philippi was a strategic location for trade despite the fact it was 13 km from Neapolis, the nearest sea port. For Paul, a Roman citizen, a Roman colony was a safe haven in a foreign land. On his Second Missionary Journey Paul visited the city (around A.D. 50–51) and there Lydia and the jailor, and their households, were converted to Christianity. Paul and Silas were unjustly imprisoned but were soon released by the magistrates of the city (Acts 16:12–40). Paul again visited the city on his Third Journey (Acts 20:6). During one of his imprisonments (probably in Rome in A.D. 61) Paul wrote the Epistle to the Philippians but there is no further mention of the jailor or Lydia.

The story of the Philippian jailor would never have been written but for a series of remarkable events triggered by a vision wherein Paul is asked to travel to Macedonia. *Act 16:9 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. Act 16:10 And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them.* I find it strange that today, so many people go to places without any clear call from the Lord such as Paul has in this vision although there seem plenty of calls from men. This is not an isolated example because it happens to Peter and Phillip. I believe that there should be very clear direction from God not men before we act, *Act 13:2 As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. Act 13:3 And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.*

Obedient to the vision Paul immediately sets sail from Troas and heads for the main city of Philippi. Here Paul meets and ministers to Lydia and her household, with whom he stays and begins an evangelistic campaign. *Act 16:14 And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. Act 16:15 And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.*

A devil possessed woman who has a spirit of Python (divination) and earns a living for her masters, follows Paul and Silas about for days. She pronounces that the men are teaching “the way of Salvation”. Paul bears with this but eventually casts out the demon and that causes the masters or owners of the woman, to protest to the authorities because they have lost their income. *Act 16:18 And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour. Act 16:19 And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into*

the marketplace unto the rulers, Act 16:20 And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city. Why did Paul wait? Because there is always a perfect time for God's plan.

The magistrates find our brothers guilty and after having them beaten up, put them in the prison with their feet in stocks. This was an illegal act by the magistrates because Philippi was a Roman colony and Paul had a right to a fair trial because he was a Roman citizen as was Silas. However, they keep that information hidden for the time being. Had he protested, it is unlikely that he would have been put in prison and met with the jailor.

Cast your minds back to that 'paroxysm' that occurred between Paul and Barnabas, *Act 15:39 And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; Act 15:40 And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God.* I believe that it was providential, because Barnabas goes to his homeland of Cyprus and Paul gets a new companion Silas (Silvanus) who is a Roman citizen. This would keep the two evangelists together as they shared this common citizenship.

Salvation is a very precious commodity. Our Lord not only died to save us but also directed that salvation towards us. *Eph 2:8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and **that not of yourselves:** it is the gift of God:* It was the grace of God that delivered us, through faith and even that faith was not our own, it was God's gift. With such a precious gift, it must be delivered perfectly and according to the eternal plan. Salvation is now directed to a lowly jailor and his family.

Had Paul already seen the jailor in 'the Macedonian vision', the man of Macedonia, beckoning him to come and help? Did Paul know all along that he should keep quiet about his Roman citizenship so as to get access to the elect jailor? Paul had to go to jail to save the jailor. Jesus must come to this chosen man and his family and as with Zacchaeus, he must abide with him. How though will Jesus awaken him, how will He speak to his soul? In order to save the Jailor, **Jesus must first break IN to the prison.**

At the end of another tiring day, a typical unexciting day, the prisoners were all locked up and it was time for supper and bed. It is not clear whether the jailor even heard the prisoners singing as if they had no care in the world. The Jailor fell into a deep and untroubled sleep, untroubled that is until the earthquake struck. There would be another earthquake in 619AD from which the city would never recover but this was the wake up call for the jailor who would recover. Just consider the chain of providence that leads to this point. The call to Macedonia, the meeting with Lydia, their Roman citizenship as a 'get out of jail free card', the demon possessed woman who would get them into the jail, an undeserved beating and most amazing of all a personal earthquake. The Apostles had to endure a flogging to save this man. Paul had to tolerate the demon possessed girl for a few days because the earthquake was not ready, now it is, everything is set. The tectonic plates are moving.

Act 16:26 And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed. Act 16:27 And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled. The jailor was horrified at the thought of his prisoners escaping. It was a crime punishable with death and this

happened to Peter's guards when he escaped. *Act 12:18 Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter. Act 12:19 And when Herod had sought for him, and found him not, he examined the keepers, and commanded that they should be put to death.*

Faced with the possibility of execution, the jailor considered it better that he take his own life. Sometimes we need earth shattering events to disturb us in our daily complacency. Conversion is very much like an earthquake that shakes the foundations of our lives and beliefs. We do not see the darkness until the Lord turns all the things that lighten our lives to OFF. It is for many, only that sense of lone desperation that finally squeezes out the cry, "What must I do to be saved?"

The Lord brought John Newton to a similar place in life, to the edge of death:

One night he was wakened by a violent wave crashing against the vessel. Water filled his cabin. Hurrying above, he found that timbers had been ripped away. All were in terrible danger as the ship plunged through a furious storm. Men pumped desperately. Clothes and bedding were stuffed into holes and boards nailed over them. John joined those who were manning the pumps.

Too exhausted to pump any longer, he was lashed to the wheel to try and steer the ship. The storm raged on and on. It was bitterly cold, the more so since the men had few clothes left. In this desperate moment John turned his eyes back over his life. Raised to the age of seven by a Christian mother, he had sought the Lord with fasts and prayers, but failing to find God he had become embittered. Despite this, the Lord preserved him through many dangers. Once he was even made a servant to slaves on the West coast of Africa.

In his heart he believed Christianity to be true. This brought him no consolation. "I concluded my sins were too great to be forgiven. I waited with fear and impatience to receive my doom." But soon he heard the glad news that the ship was freed of water. "I began to pray...to think of that Jesus that I had so often derided; I recollected his death: a death for sins not his own, but, as I remembered, for the sake of those who should put their trust in him." On this day, March 21, 1747 (new calendar) a day he ever after observed, John realized he needed a Saviour to intercede for him with God.

John Bunyan, the author of 'Pilgrim's Progress' knew that coming to Christ was a painful process:

"Conversion is not the smooth, easy-going process some men seem to think... It is wounding work, this breaking of the hearts, but without wounding there is no saving... Where there is grafting there will always be a cutting, the graft must be let in with a wound; to stick it onto the outside or to tie it on with a string would be of no use. Heart must be set to heart and back to back or there will be no sap from root to branch. And this, I say, must be done by a wound, by a cut."

What indeed must a man do when the world about him is crumbling and failing? We look for salvation, deliverance. *1Ti 4:10 For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe.* This is a peculiar statement because it suggests that Jesus 'saves' people who will not be 'saved'. To understand this

we need to understand the scope of the word 'Save'. It does not only refer to deliverance from sin at the Cross. It may be a physical deliverance.

I have met people in personal difficulties and I have prayed with them but in the end it was a local problem that needed solving. They wanted to be saved from a present nuisance, an inconvenience to their lives that had brought them pain and sorrow. When it was gone, there was no need for the comfort of religion. Salvation of the soul was not part of their problem.

The woman with the issue of blood was made whole, saved, from a physical problem. *Mat 9:21 For she said within herself, If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole (σώζω = sōzō).* *Mat 9:22 But Jesus turned him about, and when he saw her, he said, Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole (σώζω = sōzō).* *And the woman was made whole (σώζω = sōzō) from that hour.* Paul and the crew of the storm tossed cargo boat were delivered, saved from the sea. *Act 27:20 And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved (σώζω = sōzō) was then taken away.*

It is used of the deliverance of the children of Israel out of the hands of the Egyptians, *Psa 106:10 And he saved (LXX σώζω = sōzō) them from the hand of him that hated them, and redeemed them from the hand of the enemy.* *Psa 106:11 And the waters covered their enemies: there was not one of them left.* But observe this. Although Israel was physically saved as a nation, spiritually, only a faithful remnant entered Canaan. *1Co 10:9 Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents.* *1Co 10:10 Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer.* *1Co 10:11 Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.*

When the jailor cries out to be saved, we must ask whether at first his fear was for the preservation of his body or whether it was for his body and soul. Did this event open up a vision of eternity, a glimpse of hell as the world about him literally fell apart? That said, he did not fear death as he would have taken his own life if Paul had not called out. Since the prisoners had not escaped and the prison was secure, why did he still need saving and from what? Clearly, everything was back in the order that he had left it when the prisoners were locked up for the night. He could have locked everyone up again and gone back to bed but something had changed in his life. How many others felt the earthquake but did not feel the need for salvation and if they did who would direct them?

Now the jailor literally 'quaked'. Inside he was afraid, he was fearful. *Act 16:29 Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas.* Earthquakes may be extremely frightening but the earthquake had rumbled away but he was still afraid. He also knows that of all the prisoners, Paul and Silas know what to do and to them he turns and to them he prostrates. Had it been something that he had seen in a dream before the quake? Yes, he could have heard the Gospel as Paul preached in Philippi but it had not troubled him and perhaps one day we will know. I am more of an opinion that it was in his sleep that he began to turn.

Do I believe that the Lord speaks to us in dreams? Yes I do. *Job 33:14 For God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not.* *Job 33:15 In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep*

falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed; I came across this story in an article about Muslims coming to Christ. A Saudi man said his dream started with a “horrible” scene³⁰.

“One night, while I was asleep, I had this horrible dream of me being taken into hell. And what I saw there brought me real fear, and these dreams kept coming to me almost every night. At this point I was really wondering as to why I should be seeing hell in this manner,” he wrote at Answering-Islam.

He said Jesus appeared to him and said: “Son, I am the way, the truth and the life. And if you would give your life to Me, and follow Me, I would save you from the hell that you have seen”. “This came as a surprise to me, for I did not know who this Jesus was. Of course, He is mentioned in the Quran and in the book Surah Mariam. He is stated as one of our prophets, but not as a saviour who could save us from hell. So I started looking out for a Christian who could give me some advice about this Jesus I have seen.”

He said he had to reach out to an Egyptian Christian, because Christianity is “totally banned in Saudi Arabia and if a Christian is caught witnessing to a Muslim, [it is] almost sure that he would be beheaded.”

As Job observed, *Job 7:13 When I say, My bed shall comfort me, my couch shall ease my complaint; Job 7:14 Then thou scarest me with dreams, and terrifiest me through visions: Job 7:15 So that my soul chooseth strangling, and death rather than my life.* Perhaps the Lord spoke to the Jailor in a dream and that brings him to Salvation. Perhaps we should pray that the Lord would speak to those around about us that they will be brought to a deep conviction of their sin and need, in those dark lonely hours of the night, because if they are not scared, there is no need to run to the Lord.

It also seems to me that the Lord does not do the whole work of salvation in isolation from His saints, for example by telling the jailor what to do to be saved, by a dream. The Lord links the new converts to other believers, be it Ananias linked to Paul, or Peter linked to the Centurion. Here it is Paul and Silas bringing the new converts into the Church.

Notice this also, that Paul and Silas preach the Gospel **AFTER** the jailor asks for salvation. *Act 16:30 And brought them out, and said, Sirs, **what must I do to be saved?** Act 16:31 And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. Act 16:32 **And they spake unto him the word of the Lord,** and to all that were in his house.* How often does modern evangelism thrust all the solutions, all the answers in the face of unrepentant men, before there is the slightest conviction of the need? Before sin has even surfaced they are ‘saved’, because we do not want to upset them by telling them how bad their condition is. Before the fatal disease has been diagnosed, they are being treated. I think also that when they are treated it is not for the disease of the sin stained soul. Are we prepared to wait and see the Lord develop that need or are we going to rush in and solve a problem that has not been recognised?

This is the nature of the jailor’s transformation. It is so profound and powerful that he is totally convinced of his duty to his Lord. He does not wait weeks for baptism, to undergo a series of training lectures because the minister cannot believe the person is saved. The doubt is not with the convert it is with the people who do not believe that he is a convert. No, he gets baptised straightway, in the

³⁰ <http://www.wnd.com/2014/11/rising-number-of-muslims-reporting-dreams-about-jesus/>

night. That is commitment, which is the mark of transformation. If you have someone who professes salvation and they will not be baptised straightway (Lydia was also), then I question that anything has happened to them. Baptism is the first act of a sinner, *Mat 3:6 And were baptized of him (John) in Jordan, confessing their sins.* Baptism and confession of sin go together.

Mar 16:16 He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. There are those who will say and rightly that some people (the man on the cross) were saved without baptism. I say he had no opportunity and it is a fool who will risk not being baptised if he has the opportunity because he is disobedient and removes himself from Christ by his disobedience. Baptism does not save you but if you will not be baptised how are you saved? Baptism is one of the first steps of discipleship. I do not believe that what passes for Christianity today has anywhere near the commitment of this jailor. Once he has got the message, he will run with it.

We can only speculate what happened to our brother the jailor. We do not even know his name although a section of scripture is devoted to him. He is like one of those lost in war of whom it is said on their memorial 'Known unto God'. I have no doubt that he was saved for a greater purpose. In that prison, many would hear his story and the message of saving grace. It would become a place of Christian Witness. Would that in turn result in him being interned for his faith? One day we will know.

32. Mary (the burden of service).

Luk 1:26 And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, Luk 1:27 To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. Luk 1:28 And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. Luk 1:29 And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. Luk 1:30 And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. Luk 1:31 And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS.

The annunciation is one of those familiar stories that we hear each year at Christmastide. It comes with a package of traditional hymns that lead us clinically to the birth of Jesus, the Saviour. I wonder what Mary would think of what we have made of her encounter with Gabriel and her subsequent exaltation to mediatrix, the mediator of Divine grace? With reverence I say, that the mother of our Lord has been made into a caricature of herself, marketed in the 'Disneyland' of the Roman Catholic Church. She was in truth like us perhaps more blessed but certainly not more saved.

Mary may have been of the Royal lineage of David but she was no longer part of an earthly royal family. She was now a Galilean and a Galilean from Nazareth. The general view was this that it was not a nice place to live. *Joh 1:46 And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see. Galilee was not known for its prophets, Joh 7:52 They answered and said unto him, Art thou also of Galilee? Search, and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet.* Galilee was cosmopolitan, full of all sorts of ethnic groups. Isaiah called it, 'Galilee of the

Gentiles' (Is 9:1). The population of Galilee was composed of strangely mingled elements-Aramaean, Iturean, Phoenician and Greek³¹.

Galilee was not just geographically far from Jerusalem; it was considered spiritually and politically far, too. Galilee was the most pagan of the Jewish provinces, located as it was at the northernmost tier of Palestine. This distance from Zion was not only geographic; Galileans were considered by Judaeans to sit rather loosely to the law and to be less biblically pure than those in or near Jerusalem.

Galilee was also rebellious. When Jesus was about ten years old, history records an uprising led by Judas of Galilee, with an attack on Sepphoris (Sepphoris is the Roman name; the Hebrew name is Zippori). This was Herod Antipas' capital city in Galilee, 4 miles north of Nazareth. Probably a lot of men from Nazareth were in the uprising. It was crushed by the Romans, and the Romans crucified 2,000 Jews outside Sepphoris. This Herod was the son of Herod the Great, the Temple builder and murderer of the Bethlehem infants. It was Herod Antipas who put John the Baptist to death and later would send Mary's son to Pilate for sentencing to death.

Mary lived in a dangerous place in dangerous days. This young Jewish girl of the now impoverished royal house of David, no longer enjoys the privileges of rank. The Kings of Judah were never restored after the Babylonian captivity even though the tribe of Judah held to its inheritance in the land, which is why Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem for the national census. For now she is in Nazareth and betrothed to a carpenter. I am not certain that Joseph was particularly wealthy. I say this because at the purification ceremony for Mary, they do not offer a lamb. *Luk 2:22 And when the days of **her purification** according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord; Luk 2:23 (As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;) Luk 2:24 And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.*

That was the offering of a poorer person. *Lev 12:6 And when the days of her purifying are fulfilled, for a son, or for a daughter, she shall bring a lamb of the first year for a burnt offering, and a young pigeon, or a turtledove, for a sin offering, unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, unto the priest: Lev 12:7 Who shall offer it before the LORD, and make an atonement for her; and she shall be cleansed from the issue of her blood. This is the law for her that hath born a male or a female. Lev 12:8 **And if she be not able to bring a lamb**, then she shall bring two turtles, or two young pigeons; the one for the burnt offering, and the other for a sin offering: and the priest shall make an atonement for her, and she shall be clean.*

It is to this lowly girl that the Creator of Heaven and Earth sends His messenger Gabriel. The event that unfolds is one laid out in prophecy. There was a synagogue in Nazareth and we know that they had a copy of the scroll of Isaiah. *Luk 4:16 And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. Luk 4:17 And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias.....* I imagine the young Mary sat with her mother in the women's section and heard the many readings foretelling the Messiah. It was perhaps from this self same scroll of Isaiah that her son would read, some 40 or so years later, telling that He had come to announce 'the acceptable year of the Lord'?

³¹ Matthew: A Commentary, Volume 1 By Frederick Dale Bruner.

Week after week from her childhood, she would sit and fidget next to her mother while the bearded Rabbis would speak on the law and the prophets. All of this was much more precious now as the nation was under the servitude of the great Roman Empire and a wicked ruler Herod the Great. 'Herod the hypocrite' might be a better name, and it was this person that was rebuilding the Temple, the port of Caesarea in honour of his patron Caesar Augustus and the fort of Masada site of the final Jewish rebellion. It was said of this Herod that it was better to be his dog than his son.

As a child in the synagogue in Nazareth, Mary sat and listened, the sacred scroll would unroll to reveal the ancient mysteries, the people in darkness who would see a great light, a branch out of Jesse (one of Mary's ancestors) would arise, the voice in the Wilderness would sound preparing the way for the Messiah, the servant of God would be rejected and despised, He would be silent before His accusers, numbered with the transgressor, even the Servant of God's death was foretold, along with His burial in a rich man's grave. These things Mary would have heard as she sat in the synagogue in Nazareth, a child perhaps more occupied with playing with her friends as children are wont to be.

Among those ancient texts would have been this one, *Isa 7:14 Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.* Did these words float gently over her, for why should she be the subject of Scripture, she was ordinary and insignificant, surely? Did it ever pass her mind that she was written into the script? I wonder what her response would have been had she read the complete script? Would she have accepted the part? Probably not and I think we too, had we seen our scripts would in many cases rather not have been born than to suffer the things we suffer.

God hides the sorrows to come in this life lest we be overburdened but even for His mother Mary, she would not be spared. The old prophet Simeon warned her, *Luk 2:35 (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,)* what a message to give to a young mother! Yet oblivious of her destiny, she lives out her childhood and at some stage was aware of her true relationship with her God, at some stage she was born again and those ancient stories became reality to her in Nazareth but still she did not see that it was her that was spoken of in scripture, until one day the angel appears.

Luk 1:26 One month later God sent the angel Gabriel to the town of Nazareth in Galilee Luk 1:27 with a message for a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to Joseph from the family of King David. Luk 1:28 The angel greeted Mary and said, "You are truly blessed! The Lord is with you." Luk 1:29 Mary was confused by the angel's words and wondered what they meant. Luk 1:30 Then the angel told Mary, "Don't be afraid! God is pleased with you, Luk 1:31 and you will have a son. His name will be Jesus. Luk 1:32 He will be great and will be called the Son of God Most High. The Lord God will make him king, as his ancestor David was. Luk 1:33 He will rule the people of Israel forever, and his kingdom will never end." Luk 1:34 Mary asked the angel, "How can this happen? I am not married!" Luk 1:35 The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come down to you, and God's power will come over you. So your child will be called the holy Son of God. CEV.

How did we get all of this detail in Luke's account? Perhaps it was from Mary's later conversations with Luke as he put his Gospel in order? Matthew observes, *Mat 1:22 Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Mat 1:23 Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.*

Perhaps Mary thought that she would give birth in Nazareth but God had other ideas and moved the Romans to hold a census, *Luk 2:1 At that time the Emperor Augustus ordered a census of the Roman Empire. Luk 2:2 This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. Luk 2:3 All the people went to register in the cities where their ancestors had lived.* CEV. So it is that Mary makes the uncomfortable four day journey south to the city of David. I wonder where those Roman census records are today?

Luk 2:4 So Joseph went from Nazareth, a city in Galilee, to a Judean city called Bethlehem. Joseph, a descendant of King David, went to Bethlehem because David had been born there. Luk 2:5 Joseph went there to register with Mary. She had been promised to him in marriage and was pregnant. Luk 2:6 While they were in Bethlehem, the time came for Mary to have her child. Luk 2:7 She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger because there wasn't any room for them in the inn. GW.

The idea that they stayed in an 'inn' is based on a mistranslation of the Greek. In fact, according to one of my Lexicons, there were no inns in Palestine as we know them. The word that we have mistranslated as 'inn' is in fact 'guest room' or 'guest chamber'. Luke uses the same word to describe the place where the last supper took place (Luke 22:11) an upper room (not a pub). They were among family, in a family house.

These homes were very much open plan, with the guest room on the roof, or on the lower level and it led straight into the stable area because people kept their livestock in the house for a number of reasons. So there was nothing sinister about the family staying where they did and they were far from the Palestinian refugees that they are made out to be today.

Despite being highly favoured, chosen of the Lord, there were no special concessions to Mary, no grand hotel or comforts for the mother of The Son of God. No special transport, no Divine or miraculous assistance. It is quite humbling to think that if anyone deserved a bit of luxury it was Mary. What a contrast to our entitlement generation and the luxury we think is commensurate with our status as believers. This is at the core of the 'prosperity gospel':

Prosperity theology (sometimes referred to as the prosperity gospel, the health and wealth gospel, or the gospel of success) is a religious belief among some Christians, who hold that financial blessing and physical well-being are always the will of God for them, and that faith, positive speech, and donations to religious causes will increase one's material wealth. Prosperity theology views the Bible as a contract between God and humans: if humans have faith in God, he will deliver security and prosperity. The doctrine emphasizes the importance of personal empowerment, proposing that it is God's will for his people to be happy. The atonement (reconciliation with God) is interpreted to include the alleviation of sickness and poverty, which are viewed as curses to be broken by faith. This is believed to be achieved through donations of money, visualization, and positive confession.

Had Mary failed somewhere because poor Mary had none of this? It is in reality a condemnation of the whole idea of 'prosperity gospel'. Not even God's greatest servants are unduly pampered in this life when they are on active service for the Kingdom of God. It is because of this that we can empathise with Mary because her 'ordinary' life is our ordinary life. It is this ordinary life that draws

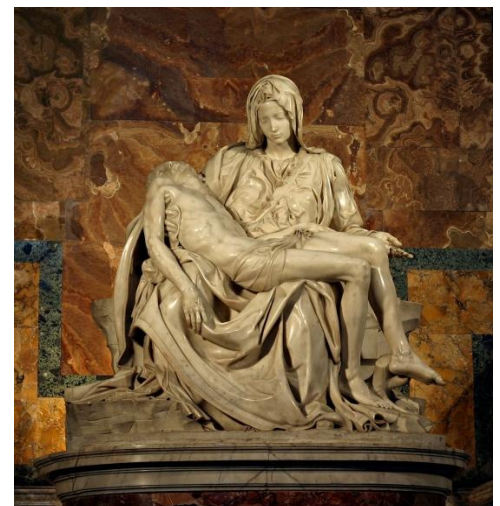
us closer to the truths of scripture because it happens to us just the same. We are not constantly rescued by miracles because that will not develop that character which is required for the Kingdom of God but at the same time we are not forsaken.

Another way that we can empathise with Mary is in this. Mary had Christ in her and so does every believer. *Gal 4:19 My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you.* Each of us in some degree brings Christ to life in our day and age. We have the Spirit giving birth to Christ in us and as with Mary, that does not happen with all the answers given in one go or without the discomfort and pain of this life. At this stage and even after the birth, I do not think that Mary fully comprehended exactly what was happening.

God had entrusted the destiny of humanity to this simple unassuming Jewish girl. How did she spend the time during her pregnancy as her body nourished the growing Jesus? Did she have questions, mysteries to be unravelled or did she patiently continue to await the next revelation? I think that she had to wait for each marvellous word to drop from the Lord. *Luk 2:33 And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him.* At the temple, her young son rebukes her, *Luk 2:49 And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business? Luk 2:50 And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them. Luk 2:51 And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart.* When she asks of the wine at the wedding feast, Mary is again led to consider a deeper truth, *Joh 2:3 And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine. Joh 2:4 Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come. Joh 2:5 His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.*

What things Mary had to tell of her prodigy, the Son of God. How we would love to know what sort of baby Jesus was, was He a contented baby, did He ever cry, what was His first word, when did He get his first teeth, when did He learn to walk? As a child we would like to know when He began to show somewhat of His religious knowledge, was He easy to talk to, was He helpful around the home, was He good at carpentry, did He ever comment on the services at the synagogue, did He have friends that He played with, what was His favourite meal, was He an early riser, did He pray a lot? Mary knew the answers to all these questions and much more but it is never allowed into the Gospels and never allowed to distract us from the focus of her Son's ministry.

At what stage she began to understand the unfolding nature of His death is not known and perhaps she did not fully comprehend it, as the other disciples did not, until after the event. In some ways, Jesus moves away from Mary as He embarks upon His ministry, *Mat 12:46 While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him. Mat 12:47 Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee. Mat 12:48 But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? Mat 12:49 And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! Mat 12:50 For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and*



mother.

Perhaps the hardest thing for Mary to do was to let the baby, the child, the youth, the man, the Son of God, go and fulfil His ministry. We see those representations of Mary cradling her dead son, the pieta, the pity, that it came to this and she must go with it. She would never have wanted it but it was the inevitable consequence of bearing the Messiah. An honour and a burden wrapped in one?

We cannot imagine the horror that Mary endured as she stood and watched her son cruelly murdered by the Romans. Feeling every blow of the hammer, the sharpness of the nails, the jolt as the Cross fell into its pit. She saw the bloodied face in agony, looking down at her and her staring up in equal pain. Had it all come to this and was this what it was all about? Even there, Jesus shows His love and concern for her, *Joh 19:25 Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. Joh 19:26 When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Joh 19:27 Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.*

It was not out of unkindness that Jesus appears first to Mary Magdalene. At least as far as the scriptural record goes, it fails to mention any appearance to His mother. What reasons might we have for this? Firstly, she suffered the horror of seeing her beloved son die. I imagine that weight of grief that Mary suffered completely took her away from everyone and everything. It may also be that it marks that separation from the earthly and the duty to the bride, the Church, *Gen 2:24 Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife and they shall become one flesh.* Mary left her home and parents and there must come a separation, even if it is by death.

Perhaps it is also true that the scripture anticipates the future idolatry, Mariolatry, in the institutional Churches that would be associated with Mary and so she must be written out of the script, for she has completed her charge. We see her last at Pentecost, now an ordinary disciple, *Act 1:14 These all were continuing steadfastly in prayer and in supplication with one mind, with the women, and with Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.*

Where did Mary go from this point forward? Perhaps she eventually went to Ephesus where tradition has it, John the Apostle resided before he was exiled on nearby Patmos? We have no idea. No Church seems to own Mary which may indicate that she had passed on. Can you imagine in our celebrity sick world how people would be falling over each other to recruit Mary to their congregation? Hey, guess who goes to our church? Mary mother of Jesus!

I read an article about how the Churches in Washington were falling over each other to recruit Bill Clinton when he became president in 1992, and how they could all use a good saxophonist! That's how shallow it all is and I bet they never bargained for all the other baggage Clinton brought with him. It should be a lesson that the only celebrity in the Church is Jesus and perhaps the early Church understood that far better than we do. *1Co 3:7 So as neither he planting is anything, nor he watering, but God making to grow.*

I think that Mary understood this from the start of her ministry. *Luk 1:46 And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, Luk 1:47 And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. Luk 1:48 For he hath*

regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. Luk 1:49 For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name. The glory was all the Lord's.

This is perhaps one of the greatest transformations that can occur in our lives. It is when we recognise that in doing our duty it merits no great favour. We were in truth fortunate to be servants in the first place. When that service is thrust upon us without choice and when it has such terrible consequences how can we look at that as a blessing from God? In the temporal short term, by any measure, it is not, it can only have that shine viewed from Glory. We are servants and we are expendable in the service of the Lord and many will die on the Lord's service. It is the way it is. *Luk 17:9 Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. Luk 17:10 So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.*

Dear Mary transforms into a perfect servant. *Luk 1:38 And Mary said, Behold, the slave woman of the Lord! May it be to me according to your word. And the angel departed from her.* LITV. How many people seek present rewards for what they do in the Name of God? Seek high office, position, authority, power for its own sake rather than be content to be a servant? Is it not the duty of any servant to serve the Master and seek the Master's glory and well being? Is this a lesson lost in the Church today where show and entertainment put men before Christ? Mary like John must decrease. *Joh 3:30 He must increase in importance, while I must decrease in importance.* GW. We must decrease that Christ may increase.

George Whitfield said of his ministry, "Let my name die everywhere, let even my friends forget me, if by that means the cause of the blessed Jesus may be promoted." It was said of David, *Act 13:36 For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption:* That is the noblest transformation, where we are launched into obscurity, airbrushed from history. Like snow our lives melt away until there is no trace of us left. How do you personally feel about that? Would it upset you if the future never remembered you? If the answer is yes, you have not learned the lesson.

That too perhaps is a key to understanding the Christian ministry. It is about finding what we can do that best serves Jesus, rather than fulfilling some need to do something for God that will make us feel of worth and something to remember us by. Mary did just that.

33. Zacchaeus (poacher to gamekeeper).

We meet Zacchaeus in that ancient city of Jericho, now rebuilt. *Luk 19:1 And Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. Luk 19:2 And, behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich.*

Jericho lies about 20km north east of Jerusalem, close to the Jordan river and is the first city that the Israelites conquered when they entered Canaan. It is one of the oldest cities in the world and the lowest city on earth (250m below sea level) situated on a trade route. It was a prime location to be a tax collector and as we might say, Zacchaeus was on to a 'nice little earner'.

A considerable amount of traffic passed through Jericho because roads through the city connected Damascus on the north, Caesarea on the west, and Egypt to the south. One

of the principal custom houses in the Roman Empire was located there, and this man named Zacchaeus was the “chief” of tax collectors in the city.

Under the Roman system, tax collecting jobs were farmed out to people who bought the right to collect taxes. Tax collectors paid a fixed amount of tax to Rome; after that, they enriched themselves by forcing the public to pay far more than what Rome required. Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector in Jericho, was a rich man (verse 2). The term “chief among the publicans” means that Zacchaeus presided over other tax gatherers, and received their collections, which were then transmitted to the Roman government. Tax collectors (publicans) were not liked by the people in any community.

They were considered the lowest of the low, *Luk 5:30 But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners?* I am not sure that we like tax collectors today, not because they are bad people, rather we do just do not like giving our hard earned money away to Governments because we do not see what they spend it on. No doubt many were going around in Zacchaeus day saying ‘what have the Romans done for us?’ Just like that Monty Python sketch where they argue, ‘apart from the aqueducts, sanitation, roads, irrigation, medicine, education, health, the wine, public baths’.

The problem with Zacchaeus was that he was a crook, creaming off money for himself because he was covetous. Not that he was a greater sinner than anyone else but being a Jew, he would have known the law, *Lev 19:35 Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard, in weight, or in measure. Lev 19:36 Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have: I am the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt. Lev 19:37 Therefore shall ye observe all my statutes, and all my judgments, and do them: I am the LORD.* I imagine that he persuaded himself that robbing the gentile Romans was perfectly acceptable. Perhaps he thought that as the taxes were Roman taxes, even if paid by the Jews, taking the money was in his eyes taking money back from the Romans.

Zacchaeus is not much different to us when it comes to being honest. *Mar 7:11 But you say, 'If a person tells his father or mother that whatever he might have used to help them is corban (that is, an offering to God), Mar 7:12 he no longer has to do anything for his father or mother.'* *Mar 7:13 Because of your traditions you have destroyed the authority of God's word. And you do many other things like that."* GW. If we want something enough we shall find all ways to justify obtaining it.

I think that this attitude will be found also in our worship. *Mal 1:6 "This is what the LORD of Armies says: A son honours his father, and a servant honours his master. So if I am a father, where is my honour? If I am a master, where is my respect? You priests despise my name. "But you ask, 'How have we despised your name?' Mal 1:7 "You offer contaminated food on my altar. "But you ask, 'Then how have we contaminated you?' "When you say that the LORD'S table may be despised. Mal 1:8 When you bring a blind animal to sacrifice, isn't that wrong? When you bring a lame or a sick animal, isn't that wrong? Try offering it to your governor. Would he accept it from you? Would he welcome you?" asks the LORD of Armies.* Some people are naïve enough to think that they can fool God with their deceitful worship. If we are honest we have much in common with Zacchaeus.

A cheat is a cheat, a liar is a liar. I have never understood those people who defend a politician who cheats on his wife as somehow honest and fit for public office, the idea being that the family domain

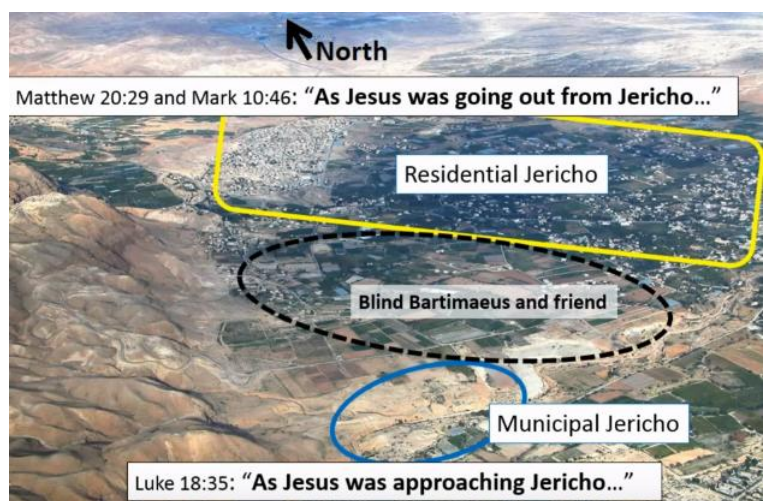
is somehow different from the public service domain. A man who cheats on his wife will cheat on anybody because he is dishonest. He has no loyalty to the truth of God's word. It is a problem rooted in a wicked heart and Zacchaeus is a poor steward both to his employers and to his God.

As to Zacchaeus' appearance, he was short in stature, probably rotund from doing little but sitting around all day collecting money. If I were to cast an actor as Zacchaeus, I would probably have chosen Danny DeVito. The Native Americans would have called Zacchaeus 'little big man', because although he was short in stature, he was a chief tax collector. I would think that Zacchaeus had a mind for figures and never forgot the details of those who owed money to the treasury. A walking encyclopaedia of the citizens of Jericho and if people deferred to him, it was because he was rich. As to his home, it would be comfortable, roomy and luxurious as befits a senior civil servant. However his life is about to be transformed forever.

These meetings in Jesus ministry are not by chance. I do not see these appointments with destiny as having any random elements. This very day was planned in eternity down to the finest detail. It is because Our Lord has a Divine appointments book. The entry for this day in history is "travel to Jericho, meet Zacchaeus at midday, have lunch, stay the night", all perfectly timed and punctual. Zacchaeus, designed in eternity, built in time, his lineage perfectly planned, already known to Jesus, would meet his Maker face to face, in this life. Even the sycamore tree (a variety of fig trees) had been planted some years earlier in exactly this place in Jericho, to grow in time to provide a perfect perch for the tiny tax man. As we saw with the Philippian jailor, **God is in the detail.** *Act 2:47 And the Lord added to the church **daily** such as should be saved.*

We sometimes think that we are indispensable to evangelism and that if we do not go out and thrash around on the mission field for years, no one will get saved. Such is the arrogance of our man centred evangelism. I am convinced we need to be directed by the Lord. Take this example. *Act 8:26 And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south (midday) unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. Act 8:27 And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, Act 8:28 Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet.* Philip was given the time that he should go and meet the Ethiopian! Midday. Too early or too late, they would have missed each other.

This encounter with Zacchaeus occurs immediately before Jesus goes up to Jerusalem to His death. It was one of the final acts of His ministry. The meeting with Zacchaeus follows the healing of the blind man, Bartimaeus. Luke states that Jesus was entering Jericho, *Luk 18:35 And it came to pass, that as he was come nigh unto Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the way side begging.* Mark puts the event as Jesus was leaving Jericho *Mar 10:46 And they came to Jericho: and as he went out of Jericho with his disciples and a great number of people, blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, sat by the highway*



side begging. The explanation is that Jesus is leaving the residential district of Jericho (Mark's viewpoint), moving into the Municipal district of Jericho (Luke's viewpoint), which was about 1.5km outside of the residential area³².

You may imagine Zacchaeus' surprise, that out of all the people lining the way, Jesus calls him out by name. *Luk 19:5 And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house. Luk 19:6 And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully.* It is such a personal encounter but then all of our encounters should be personal. We are saved by a person, Jesus, not an organisation.

There was also a conviction of sin that Jesus brought to the encounter because Zacchaeus repents of his theft. *Luk 19:7 And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner. Luk 19:8 And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.*

What was the purpose of staying with a tax collector, even a reformed tax collector? It may be to record indelibly, at the end of His ministry, that these were the very people He came to save, *Luk 19:9 And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham. Luk 19:10 For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.*

What a transformation occurs when a man truly meets with His Maker and His Saviour. He is now an honest man, he is reconciled with God and he will be reconciled with man but at what cost? This is career suicide. If the Romans were not aware of his cheating, they certainly are now and so are the Jews. Zacchaeus will pay a price for discipleship. The public now have it all out in the open light of day. Can Zacchaeus continue as a tax collector or will he be an evangelist? Sometimes conversion will require a change in career, like this one:

Frederick Nicholas Charrington (4th February 1850 – 2nd January 1936) was an English social reformer who renounced succession to a fortune in order to devote his life to temperance work. Frederick was born in the Bow Road, in the East End of London. His father was a partner in the Charrington Brewery, one of London's biggest brewing companies. Frederick was heir to a fortune of a million and a quarter pounds (between £120 million and £2billion in today's money). He was educated at Marlborough College, but left because of illness and finished his school career at Brighton College. He subsequently joined the family business.

At the age of 19, Frederick had a conversion experience and became an Evangelical Christian. About a year later, while walking through Whitechapel, he saw a poorly dressed woman with her children begging her husband to leave a public house and give her money for food. The furious husband came out and knocked her into the gutter. Frederick went to help and was also knocked to the ground. Looking up, he saw his name on the sign above the pub. "When I saw that sign," he later wrote, "I was stricken just as surely as Paul on the Damascus Road. Here was the source of my family wealth,

³² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zVmagXx-n34&t=203s>

and it was producing untold human misery before my own eyes. Then and there I pledged to God that not another penny of that money should come to me.”

Frederick abandoned the family business to devote his life to helping the poor in the East End. He opened a school, led a fight to clean up the music halls and became an ardent worker for the Temperance Movement. In 1870 he founded the Tower Hamlets Mission and made the Great Assembly Hall in the Mile End Road a centre of Christian work in the East End of London.

In 1903 he purchased Osea Island off the coast of Maldon in Essex and established a treatment centre for people with alcohol and opiate addictions. In return for free treatment, clients would remain on the island and work the land. He was one of the original members of the London County Council (1889–95).

Zacchaeus’ and Frederick’s conversions brought about a change in their stewardship of the things that they owned and this is perhaps why the Lord brings Zacchaeus into the story at this point in time. It leads perfectly into the departure of the Lord and the duties of the Saints left behind. Let me explain. We cannot leave the story of Zacchaeus separate from the story that Jesus tells the gathered company. What is the connection? It is about stewardship. We must not view Christianity as Salvation in isolation from the Service that issues as a result of that change in our lives. We cannot compartmentalise Christianity from our working lives. A Christian is a steward, *1Pe 4:10 each one as he received a gift, ministering it to yourselves as good stewards of the manifold grace of God*. To be a Christian is to live like a Christian. Zacchaeus had been transformed from an unjust steward into a just steward. It was a pattern for other disciples.

The people who heard Zacchaeus speak with Jesus had an idea that the end was nigh and that the Kingdom of God was about to appear. They were wrong and they needed to understand that the task of preaching the Kingdom was still in hand. *Luk 19:11 And as they heard these things, he added and spake a parable, because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear. Luk 19:12 He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. Luk 19:13 And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come. Luk 19:14 But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us. Luk 19:15 And it came to pass, that when he was returned, having received the kingdom, then he commanded these servants to be called unto him, to whom he had given the money, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading. Luk 19:16 Then came the first, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds. Luk 19:17 And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities.*

To counter this error that the Kingdom of God was about to appear and that the end of all things had arrived, Jesus relates a parable about stewardship. The parable here, about the 10 minas (pounds), is similar to the parable of the Talents but the parable of the Talents was given on the Mount of Olives, *Mat 24:3 And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?* It is eschatological, that is, it speaks of the ‘last things’ but in essence the Talents are giving a similar message to the 10 Minas.

Because the Parable of the Ten Minas is similar to the Parable of the Talents in Matthew (25:14–30) some people assume that they are the same parable, but there are enough differences to warrant a distinction: the parable of the minas was told on the road between Jericho and Jerusalem; the parable of the talents was told later on the Mount of Olives. The audience for the parable of the minas was a large crowd; the audience for the parable of the talents was the disciples by themselves. The parable of the minas deals with two classes of people: servants and enemies; the parable of the talents deals only with professed servants. In the parable of the minas, each servant receives the same amount; in the parable of the talents, each servant receives a different amount (and talents are worth far more than minas). Also, the return is different: in the parable of the minas, the servants report ten-fold and five-fold earnings; in the parable of the talents, all the good servants double their investment. In the former, the servants received identical gifts; in the latter, the good servants showed identical faithfulness.

I leave it to you to work out for yourself exactly what the talents and minas are. It may help to ask the questions:

1. What does God give me according to my ability? (Talents).
2. What does God give me in equal measure to other servants? (Minas).

There are perhaps some conclusions that we may draw from the issue of stewardship and how it should transform us. **Firstly** it is clear that we are not created equal as far as abilities go even though we are all saved in the same manner. Some are given more responsibilities than others and in the Churches, God endows His flock with different abilities such that they function as a body. Individually, we need to understand our abilities, strengths and weaknesses and learn to work to our strengths. We should be careful of mimicking others when we do not have their gifts and we should be true to what we are. *1Co 15:10 But **by the grace of God I am what I am**: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.*

Secondly, achievement comes through work and often hard work. The idea that we can sit on the things that God endows us with and do nothing with them is a punishable offence. That is to despise the grace of God. *Heb 10:29 Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and **hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace**?* There is, I think, a difference between doing something badly and doing absolutely nothing at all. Some may build badly but none the less they build, *1Co 3:12 Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble*; Stewards are to work at their stewardship.

Thirdly, God always equips us for the tasks that He gives us. *2Pe 1:3 According as his divine power hath **given unto us all things** that pertain unto **life and godliness**, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue*: The trouble is that we do not take time to make an inventory of those “things”. What are those “things” that pertain to life and godliness? If we do not know what those “things” are, we certainly will not know how to use them. One of those things is the scripture, *Rom 15:4 For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.*

You can tell whether a person is steeped in God's word by their attitude to life. They are 'hopeful'. They are positive because they believe what God says and they know what God says. They do not scratch around in the dark for some comfort when the lights go out and things look bleak. They have a storehouse of wisdom which they switch on, open up and feed upon. They are familiar with the things that pertain to life and godliness. Jerome said that, "To be ignorant of Scripture is to be ignorant of Christ." I would say that if a person has no interest in scripture that Christ does not live in them, because by His very nature Christ draws us to the word of God.

Fourthly, stewardship and service remind us that we have a Master. *Eph 6:8 Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free. Eph 6:9 And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him.* Our Master is whom we serve and we cannot serve our earthly masters if we do not serve Him well. Our earthly service is by this directed to Christ. What ever we do is to be directed to Christ, *Col 3:17 And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him. Col 3:23 And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men;*

This would mean that if, for example, you were doing something, perhaps preparing a meal for someone, you would not do it any differently if Jesus was coming to dinner. You would do it the best that you could for anyone because you are doing it as to the Lord.

Fifthly, finally and inevitably, life catches up with us. Stewards will be held to account. The parable of the talents and the minas warn against being lazy stewards. There is a day of reckoning to answer for how we used the opportunities and gifts that God gave us.

Zacchaeus realised in time that he could not have Christ while being a poor steward. We too cannot take that risk.

34. Mary Magdalēnē, apostle to the apostles.

We shall have to wait until Glory to discover what happened to the lives of the Saints in the Bible after those encounters with Jesus. They pass our window as we travel through the Bible and disappear. Sometimes we see more of a person's life than others and I think that Mary Magdalēnē is such a one.

Where or what is Magdala? In the Talmud, Magdala is called by its Aramaic name, Migdal Nunaia. The name means "Tower of Fish." Magdala was famous for its skill in processing fish and in the first century the town was called by another name illustrating this. In the Greek language it was called Tarichaea, again, referring to it as a place of salting or processing fish.

We read in the New Testament about two miracles that Jesus performed, both including some type of small fish. It is thought today that the small fish were the plentiful Kinneret sardines. The boy could not have had them in his lunch unless they were preserved in some fashion and it is likely that the fish were either salted or smoked and it quite possible that these little fish were originally processed at Magdala.



Soon after the time of Jesus, Magdala suffered a tragic blow. After the revolt against Rome began in AD 66, Magdala was defeated by the Romans. The historian, Josephus, a Jewish fighter turned supporter of Rome, recounts that the Romans under Titus conquered the city with much bloodshed. Since Magdala was a centre of boat building, many of the remaining residents fled to the sea in their vessels. A great sea battle resulted with a total of 6,500 Jews slaughtered in the sea and on land. Josephus describes how the sea became bloody and full of dead bodies. Titus' father, Vespasian, then decreed that the remaining citizens would not be spared. The old and infirm were slaughtered. Six thousand of the city's strongest were given as slaves to Nero, and the remaining thousands were sold in the slave markets.

Vespasian himself had nearly perished under Nero, having offended the mad emperor by falling asleep at one of his interminable recitals for which he was well known. Vespasian fled but was recalled as one of the best Generals and sent to quell the Jewish revolt as Rome fell apart at the seams. Vespasian became emperor and reconstructed the empire but the first century was a turbulent time and it is remarkable that Christianity flourished in this atmosphere of uncertainty, but perhaps that is why?

Who was the Magdalēnē (Μαγδαληνή = Magdalēnē)? *Luk 8:1 Soon after this, Jesus was going through towns and villages, telling the good news about God's kingdom. His twelve apostles were with him, Luk 8:2 and so were some women who had been healed of evil spirits and all sorts of diseases. One of the women was Mary Magdalēnē, who once had seven demons in her. Luk 8:3 Joanna, Susanna, and many others had also used what they owned to help Jesus and his disciples. Joanna's husband Chuza was one of Herod's officials.* The Magdalēnē was a woman with some means and she used that to support Jesus' ministry.

She was demonized but was she also a harlot? That depends upon whether you connect her with the events in the previous chapter? *Luk 7:37 And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, Luk 7:38 And stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.*

You may recall the study on "A tale of three Kisses" (The Hard sayings of Jesus p.57) where we made some associations between key characters in the Gospels. There was Simon the Pharisee a.k.a. Simon the leper. We suggested Simon the leper was Simon the Pharisee by relating the events in Matthew chapter 26 to Luke chapter 7. *Mat 26:6 Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, Luk 7:36 And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat.* We even suggested that that Simon could be Judas' father, *Joh 6:71 He spake of Judas Iscariot the son of Simon: for he it was that should betray him, being one of the twelve.*

The narrative at Bethany takes place in the week before the Passover, when Jesus was crucified. *Joh 12:1 Then Jesus six days before the passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead. Joh 12:2 There they made him a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him. Joh 12:3 Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. Joh 12:4 Then saith one of his disciples,*

Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him, Joh 12:5 Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?

I considered Mary of Bethany was quite an attractive woman and that she had possibly made a good living out of prostitution. I say this because she has secrets that Simon the Leper knew about. *Luk 7:39 Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner.* It does not say what sins but I suggest they are sexual because that would have defiled a man. She was a fallen woman once but now has been restored.

Is it possible that Mary of Bethany could have been the Magdalēnē? A woman cleansed of devils who travelled and sat at the feet of Jesus, who returns to her family at Bethany? It is not unreasonable to have the person healed of their demons being told to return to where they lived to testify the grace of God.

I would also suggest a further reason for the association I make. Mary of Bethany clearly worshipped Jesus and had anointed Him, *Joh 12:7 Jesus replied, "Leave her alone! She has kept this perfume for the day of my burial.* CEV. Mary seems to be aware of the coming death of Jesus. Why then do we not find this Mary of Bethany at the crucifixion? Bethany is so close to Jerusalem (~3km) it was a short walk to get there and she is clearly devoted, why is she not mentioned? However, if Mary of Bethany is the same Mary the Magdalēnē, then the puzzle is solved. **However, this is all very speculative on my part.**

The name Magdalēnē has come into our language in the form of the word 'maudlin' which describes something as sentimental or 'weepy'. This has come about because the artists that used to portray Mary Magdalēnē, showed her as a sorrowful character perhaps portrayed as a penitent for her sin. She is also somewhat of an enigma. We see her but we do not get very close to her. She is there in the cameos of the Gospel but we cannot get many words out of her and she appears elusive.

Was she ever married (she does not have a husband's name but is named after a place), was she a widow? We do not know but we know that after she met Jesus, there was no one else in her life and she followed Him to His execution, His grave and His resurrection. She is transformed into a disciple who is totally committed to Christ. She financially supports the ministry of Christ as we should. What an example that is to us and how far are we prepared to go with Jesus?

We see more of the Magdalēnē as we approach the last days of Jesus. I cannot believe at this critical hour that the disciples became less cohesive, less together as a body. The uncertainties and fears would have pulled them together and no more so, I think, than at that famous 'last supper' Passover. Our view of that event is often coloured by the images produced by the old masters, especially the world's most recognisable painting, 'The Last Supper' mural by Leonardo da Vinci, housed in the refectory of the Convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan. It is a picture of 12 men sitting around a table (not reclining) in a very western position. *Luk 22:14 And when the hour was come, he sat down, and the twelve apostles with him.* Does this mean that only twelve were present? Tintoretto painted it differently.

What about the other disciples? What about the sisters? In Acts we read, *Act 1:21 Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among*

us, Act 1:22 Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection. Act 1:23 And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. Why would they be excluded from the supper if they had been there from the beginning?

What about the disciples on the Emmaus road? *Luk 24:18 And the one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answering said unto him, Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days?* These were not necessarily two men, they could be a husband and wife because Cleopas was married to Mary, *Joh 19:25 Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleopas, and Mary Magdalēnē.* These travellers engage in conversation with an unrecognisable Jesus, that is, until Jesus breaks bread. *Luk 24:33 And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them, Luk 24:34 Saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon. Luk 24:35 And they told what things were done in the way, **and how he was known of them in breaking of bread.*** This suggests that they were present at the last supper in order to recognise Him breaking bread. My point is that there is evidence to suggest that the Magdalēnē could have been at the last supper with the other women disciples and men other than the twelve.



I might also suggest in passing that the room in which the 'last supper' was held may also be the same upper room in the book of Acts. *Act 1:13 And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. Act 1:14 These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren. Act 1:15 And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an **hundred and twenty**,)* It was not a small upper room even by today's standards.

It is at the crucifixion that we see a difference between the devotion of the women disciples of Jesus and the men. Although the women only have a passing mention in the Gospels, it seems to me that the women are far more loyal. When Jesus is taken by the Jews, the men melt away. If Mary Magdalēnē was typical of the other women, then they had a greater sense of forgiveness because of what they had been delivered from. *Luk 7:47 Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.* I think the men disciples lacked the sense of the depth of forgiveness that the women had before Jesus death and that may explain their actions. If the Apostles are convicted of sin, in the Gospels, there is little record of it.

Am I being unfair to the men disciples? This is what the men record, *Luk 23:27 And there followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him. Joh 19:25*

Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalēnē. If we make a list we arrive at the following who were present:

- Mary Magdalēnē(mentioned by Matthew, Mark, and John)
- Mary the mother of James and Joses (mentioned by Matthew and Mark)
- The mother of Zebedee's sons (mentioned by Matthew)
- Salome (mentioned by Mark)
- Mary the mother of Jesus (mentioned by John)
- Mary the wife of Clophas (mentioned by John)
- An un-named sister of Jesus' mother (mentioned by John)
- The un-named Beloved Disciple (mentioned by John)



One man to seven women! We cannot say that there are more women because of the argument 'the men were wanted by the authorities and the women were not'. The women were disciples as well! There are records where a man's family including his children, were crucified with him so any association with a condemned man was dangerous. I think that the women were more courageous and more loving than the men. Then as now men ought to 'man up' and be men!

At the cross we see the Magdalēnē, *Mar 15:40 There were also women looking on afar off: among whom was Mary Magdalēnē, and Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses, and Salome; After the death of Jesus, they are still there at the internment, Mat 27:59 And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, Mat 27:60 And laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed. Mat 27:61 And there was Mary Magdalēnē, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre.....Mar 15:47 And Mary Magdalēnē and Mary the mother of Joses beheld where he was laid.*

Being good Jews, the women leave to observe the Sabbath. In the interim, the Romans had sealed the tomb and posted a guard. *Mat 27:64 Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first.* An earthquake occurs that not only moves the stone from the tomb but also removes the guards, who run away. *Mat 28:1 In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalēnē and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. Mat 28:2 And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it.* The women return to embalm Jesus. *Mar 16:1 And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalēnē, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him.*

It is during these events that Jesus appears first to the Magdalēnē. *Joh 20:15 Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. Joh 20:16 **Jesus saith unto her, Mary.** She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master. Joh 20:17 Jesus saith unto her, **Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father:** but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and*

your God. Joh 20:18 Mary Magdalēnē came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken these things unto her.

The idea of Jesus as a gardener draws us back to Eden and the first Adam who was also a gardener. It may be of interest for you to know that the only gentile Messiah mentioned in the Bible was Cyrus who released the Jews from Babylon to rebuild their temple. Messiah means anointed and Cyrus was God's anointed, *Isa 45:1 Thus saith the LORD to his anointed (מָשִׁיחַ = māshîyach), to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut; Cyrus the Great is also referred to as the "Good Gardener" of Persia, as were his successors.*

The events after the resurrection place Mary in a position of privilege because she is the first person to see Jesus alive and she becomes the messenger of the good news. Why, though did Jesus say 'touch me not'? The other disciples did touch, *Mat 28:8 And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring his disciples word. Mat 28:9 And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. **And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him.** Mat 28:10 Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me. Thomas did, Joh 20:27 Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.*

In an attempt to explain this commentators have suggested that Jesus meant 'do not cling to me', 'do not hold on to me', implying that Jesus must be given leave to go to the father. The Greek word ἅπτομαι = haptomai = touch, is consistently translated 'touch' by the King James version, never 'cling'. To my mind this is straining the language to get an explanation. I will suggest that the meaning may lie elsewhere. Jesus often speaks in riddles, *Joh 2:4 Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come....Joh 4:7 There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink.....Mar 8:15 And he charged them, saying, Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod.*

I will suggest that Jesus constantly looks through the lens of the events before Him to the greater spiritual meanings that are to be found in the Kingdom of God. When He looks at the Magdalēnē, He looks through her to what she symbolises and that is the Church, His bride. He sees beyond the 'now' to the glory. The Magdalēnē is the bride redeemed. She is the Church, the fallen woman, the forgiven woman, the redeemed woman, the glorified woman. It is what is theologians called 'the Golden Chain', *Rom 8:29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Rom 8:30 Moreover **whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.*** Jesus will let the Church touch Him in Glory.

Perhaps this also hearkens back to Genesis, again in another garden, *Gen 3:2 And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: Gen 3:3 But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, **neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.*** It is both a reminder of the fall from Grace and the restoration to life eternal.

There is a further recognition of the Magdalēnē conferred by the Historic church. Mary Magdalēnē, who according to John 20:17–18 and Mark 16:9–1, was 'commissioned' or sent (hence Apostle) by

the risen Jesus to inform the disciples of his resurrection, has been merited the title "Apostle to the apostles" by the Roman Catholic Church. Mary accomplished something that the twelve selected disciples did not accomplish. She followed Jesus all the way to the cross and three days later she was the first witness to the resurrection of the Lord.

Beyond those great events we lose sight of the Magdalēnē, who we shall remember as perhaps the most loyal disciple. But there is a footnote from history. The Gospel of Mary (Magdala) is an apocryphal book discovered in 1896 in a 5th-century papyrus codex (a book) written in Sahidic Coptic (Egyptian spoken in upper Egypt). The codex Papyrus Berolinensis 8502 was purchased in Cairo by German scholar Karl Reinhardt.

Then Mary stood up. She greeted them all, addressing her brothers and sisters, "Do not weep and be distressed nor let your hearts be irresolute. For his grace will be with you all and will shelter you. Rather we should praise his greatness, for he has prepared us and made us true Human beings." When Mary had said these things, she turned their heart [to]ward the Good, and they began to deba[t]e about the wor[d]s of [the Saviour]. Peter said to Mary, "Sister, we know that the Saviour loved you more than all other women. Tell us the words of the Saviour that you remember, the things which you know that we don't because we haven't heard them." Mary responded, "I will teach you about what is hidden from you." And she began to speak these words to them. She said, "I saw the Lord in a vision and I said to him, 'Lord, I saw you today in a vision. 'He answered me, 'How wonderful you are for not wavering at seeing me! For where the mind is, there is the treasure.'

Just why this document was written is unknown. Do I think that it is genuine? If it is, it was not important enough to put in the public domain during many important epochs of the Church. It has been suggested that these documents were suppressed in order to hinder women coming into the ministry of the Gospel. I do not see that idea has the support of the early church. Husbands and wives ministered together, for example, Priscilla and Aquila.

I do think however, that these apocryphal stories will lay more foundation for the feminist movement in the churches. I do not think that the Magdalēnē wanted to be a feminist icon any more than Mary the mother of Jesus wanted to have statues made of her. Perhaps if we familiarised ourselves with the lives of the Bible women, we would do them more justice and respect if we accepted them for the great people that they were rather than change them into something they were not to fit our modern apostate world view.

35. Lost and found, a wayward son's journey.

Please read Luke Chapter 15:11 - 32. This story is called 'Parable of the Prodigal Son'. A prodigal is an improvident, reckless waster, yet this person is more than that. Unfortunately our thoughts are concentrated by the title 'The prodigal Son' which is not part of the text and is a well meaning attempt to summarise the story.

Neither am I certain that this is a story that Jesus invented and it may be one of those life observations that you get and store to illustrate truth. People in the region of Galilee (Gadara), where Jesus ministered kept plenty of pigs so that was part of daily life. There were also pleasure resorts, like Tiberius on the sea of Galilee with its hot springs. Then in the country, there were the

hard working farmers and their sons attracted to the pleasures of the flesh in the nearby towns, just as Samson was. If my speculation is wrong, there are still many other life stories that match this son's history.

In the wider context of the chapter, this is a story about 'lost and found'. A sheep that gets lost and is found, a coin gets lost and found and this son who gets lost and is found. It is not about a son who gets saved but a son who is with the Father and gets lost. It is not a salvation story but a story about repentance. It is about a son who turns his back on his father and his father's house. It is about a son who already has it all and takes what he has, misuses it, wastes it and loses it. Despite all of this, he is still welcomed home to the Father, for all is not lost. What is lost as we shall see was the son's mind. He was not in his right mind when he behaved as he did and he needed to find himself, he needed to come to his senses. He needed to get back home.

This is not just a story about repentance but also a story that suggests we might foolishly abuse our father's generosity and our father's house. The transformation that must occur is that we must learn to become a servant and not a partner!

*Luk 15:11 And he said, A certain man had two sons: Luk 15:12 And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto **them** his living (βίος = bios).* Why did he want his inheritance? Did he like the Father? Was it the father's righteous house that he did not like, such that he could not leave it soon enough? The father however was fair to both sons and divided his living between them such that they were both wealthy. It was a level playing field, or was it? Was the younger son more outspoken than his elder brother who seems to need considerable provocation before he speaks his mind? Neither does the elder brother persuade the younger brother to stay maybe because he now has his eyes on what he will get in addition, namely the farm.

The younger son wants all this and heaven too but that is not possible. He has the big win, the lottery, life changing and potentially life destroying. He is like 'Christians' who want salvation but he does not want that to interfere with this worldly life. He wants the things of His Father and the things of this life. Life must be lived because you only get one chance. He is generation 'ME' and the world revolves around him. He is the ultimate consumer. The future, that never comes, encourages him not to make any provision. The phrase 'eat drink and be merry' was made for him.

Morality does not guide him but his appetite does. Right and wrong do not come in to the matter, it is about personal pleasure, personal satisfaction. I read in the paper recently of a woman who won a million pounds on the lottery. She managed to spend it quickly on vanities. "The woman, moaned about scooping the £1million with her first ever ticket when she was 17, saying that her newfound wealth had made her miserable. But after blowing her fortune on new cars, handbags, new teeth, new bust and a new bottom she says she is finally happy after bagging teenage football starlet Jordan Piggott She said her new teeth, her new bust and her new bottom is a better investment than the properties she's bought."

This is the self-serving generation and it has become a way of life in the church. People think that if you sing a few hymns each week, say some nice words about 'the Love of God', throw a few pennies in a collection, support a poor community in the third world, then you have done your bit to God for the week. Now it is His turn to serve you, to make you prosperous, to make you invulnerable, to

make you healthy, to give you 'all this and heaven too'. God now becomes that genie in the lamp and all you have to do is rub it and out pops the answer to every request you make. Ask yourself 'who now is the servant?'

This wastrel son wanted all that he could get from his father so that he could live his own life. That is exactly how the Gospel is perceived by many in churches. People say, 'well I got saved years ago'. 'You do not have to go to church to live a good life'. Really? Then what happened to you, did you just get on with life as normal or did you change? Did you become a disciple taking up your cross daily? Did you become a servant of Jesus Christ? No? Then you are deceived and you are still alienated from God.

Respect would have honoured the inheritance but this is a disrespectful waster. He does not respect himself or his father. The waster completely lacked respect for the father's labours or the labours of others. It is the same in a spiritual sense for many. There is a complete lack of appreciation of the magnitude of God's sacrifice for us. It is what has been termed 'cheap grace'. It is no wonder that the Lord turns on those who reject His beloved Son, *Joh 3:17 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. Joh 3:18 He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.* These are dead men walking! The waster is a dead man walking. Easy come easy go.

Luk 15:13 And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. There are no pleading words from the father, no compromises to retain the company of this wastrel. He does not chase after him with tears and bribes to stay. Let him go! If he does not hit the bottom of life and find out what he is truly like he will remain a waster. If he does not get broken, he will never need mending.

Having spoken two parables in Luke chapter 15 on the 'Lost sheep' and the 'lost coin' and how that which was lost was found after a search, there is no searching for the lost here. There is no good shepherd chasing this sheep. The father does not go out to retrieve the wayward son. While the scripture states that none of the elect are lost, that statement can only be personally verified when we get to glory. Sinners should not presume upon the grace of God, that because of some sort of vague commitment in the past, that they will always be delivered from the consequences of their folly.

The young son, when he had exhausted his funds was deserted. Perhaps he was not a particularly skilled person or his lifestyle had been observed by those around him and he was not to be trusted. Nobody would give to this waster. The fool may have 'friends' when his wallet is full but nobody wants the company of the penniless fool. They drop him like a hot brick. *Luk 15:14 And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. Luk 15:15 And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. Luk 15:16 And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.*

How the mighty have fallen, *Luk 15:17 And **when he came to himself**, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!* This phrase is most enlightening. "**When he came to himself**". How do you come to yourself? Where were you

when you were away from yourself? Coming to self, returning to self, implies that he lost himself, but that now he had found himself. As believers, we may have times in our lives when we look back and say, “What on earth possessed me to do that?” or “What was I thinking when I did that?” or “I must have been out of my mind to have done that?” Is there a way back from our sin and waywardness? The answer from this story is absolutely, yes. To get to that point we need to find out where we are.

“Know Thyself” was written on the forecourt of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi and the earliest reference to the Oracle is in Homer. Ancient stories say how on the side of Mount Parnassos there was a cleft where goats suddenly began crying and leaping about. When the goatherds approached, they experienced the same; man and animal acting as if possessed. Some reported visions, others foretold the future; some apparently disappeared into the cleft, overcome by the fumes, losing sense of this reality and suffering the fatal consequences. It was all down to the effects of inhaling Ethylene gas produced underground.

When word got out, it was believed at the time that the vapours emanating from the chasm put mortals in contact with the gods; the local community thus built a shrine and appointed a woman as the exclusive conduit through which man could communicate with the gods. For her own safety, they made a tripod on which she sat, to make sure she did not fall into the chasm when she became light-headed from inhaling the vapours. Once, this woman Oracle’s utterance could change the destiny of nations and she was not just consulted by leaders of various Greek city states, but also by kings.

Delphi and its like, rarely provided simple answers. Take the famous example of King Croesus of Lydia. Croesus asked at Delphi whether he should wage war against the Persians. He was told that he would destroy a great empire. Taking the response to predict victory, he launched a military confrontation with Xerxes, Persia’s mighty king. Croesus did end up destroying an empire, his own. The neurotic Roman emperor Nero, meanwhile, tried to learn the timing of his own death from the Delphic oracle. He was told to “beware of the 73rd year” and so considered himself safe, but was murdered shortly after by Galba who was, you guessed it, 73 years old. Both Croesus of Lydia and Chilon of Sparta enquired at Delphi about what was best to know. Both received a response saying that to “know thyself” (gnōthi seauton) was best.

John Calvin in his “Institutes of Christian Religion” wrote:

Without knowledge of God there is no knowledge of self: On the other hand, it is evident that man never attains to a true self-knowledge until he have previously contemplated the face of God, and come down after such contemplation to look into himself. For (such is our innate pride) we always seem to ourselves just, and upright, and wise, and holy, until we are convinced, by clear evidence, of our injustice, vileness, folly, and impurity. Convinced, however, we are not, if we look to ourselves only, and not to the Lord also - He being the only standard by the application of which this conviction can be produced. For, since we are all naturally prone to hypocrisy, any empty semblance of righteousness is quite enough to satisfy us instead of righteousness itself. And since nothing appears within us or around us that is not tainted with very great impurity, so long as we keep our mind within the confines of human pollution, anything which is in some small degree less defiled delights us as if it were most pure just as an eye, to which

nothing but black had been previously presented, deems an object of a whitish, or even of a brownish hue, to be perfectly white.

In Jesus' story, a mirror was held to the waster's face. The scripture says, *Rom 7:7 What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. Rom 7:8 But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead. Rom 7:9 For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.*

Paul is saying that there was a time when he was ignorant of what he was like. When the Lord made him look into the Law he saw just what he was like. *Rom 3:20 Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.* So by degrees, the waster sees himself in the mirror of God's law and is transformed. *2Co 3:18 But we all with our face having been unveiled, having beheld the glory of the Lord in a mirror, are being changed into the same image from glory to glory, as from the Lord Spirit.* LITV.

The young wastrel son realises what he really is like and that he is a sinner before God and man. *Luk 15:18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, Luk 15:19 And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.* The waster cannot repent until he has seen his sin writ large. This is sin discovered, this is 'know thyself', this is the beginning of a transformation. This is not the first time conviction of sin and repentance, it is the repentance from subsequent sin, sins of the believers. To those who say Christians can be sinless, **I say liars** *1Jn 1:8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, the truth is not in us.* Above all we need to 'know ourselves'.

The man now has found himself and like the Gadarene demoniac, can make reasonable decisions for he is in his right mind, he has sobered up. What he sees now is that he is a sinner, a sinner against heaven, that is God and a sinner before his father. How was he a sinner before his father? All he had done was to ask for an early delivery of his inheritance, was that a sin? There must have been something deeper that prompted that confession. Something in his attitude to his father, the way he treated his father, the way he despised his father's labours and squandered his fortune. Yes he was unworthy but he was prepared to throw himself on his father's mercy. Will he be received?

The transformation runs deeper than this. Whereas he was once the son of the household, he now sees his unworthiness and would sooner be a servant, 'make me as one of thy hired servants'. *Luk 15:20 And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. Luk 15:21 And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.*

When we read this story of 'lost and found' story, we concentrate on the theme of restoration of relationships and that is not wrong, but we overlook some other things. The sin had to be dealt with and the attitude changed. The man will now serve his father. He will be a slave, a domestic and his father's will must be his. He is transformed by an elevated sense of duty and service.

When you look at the great Christians in the New Testament you will observe this. They are all servants of Jesus Christ. *Rom 1:1 Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated*

unto the gospel of God, Col 4:12 **Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ**, saluteth you, Jas 1:1 **James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ**, 2Pe 1:1 **Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ**, Jud 1:1 **Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ**. It strikes me that the days of service have long since disappeared and I do not see a church of either disciples or servants today. Ask someone, how do you serve the Lord, how are you a servant of Jesus Christ? Do they have the slightest idea? If you do not know how to serve, how can you be a servant? Can we say that our service is merely made up of listening to sermons or singing hymns? Is that it?

The servant is now rewarded. Luk 15:22 *But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: Luk 15:23 And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: Luk 15:24 **For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.*** A sinner saved is a thing to rejoice over. Luk 15:10 *Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.* If angels are happy, so should we be for every blood bought son of God. If we love them at the start of their new life we must love them through it. Perhaps we should even have a celebration for returning sinners and kill the fatted calf, because the angels rejoice.

What are we rejoicing about? The father's younger son was dead but now is alive, not physically for he was alive physically when he left. He was in a sense dead in that he was separated from the father as he raged in his dissipation. Yet if truth be known, the son was dead before he left his father's house. He was dead to the love, the care and the kindness of his father's house. Now he is back and it is not that the son was born there but that he of his volition wanted to be there and live with his father.

However, not everyone is pleased about a repentant son. Luk 15:25 *Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing. Luk 15:26 And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. Luk 15:27 And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound.*

What was the elder son's problem? Luk 15:28 **And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. Luk 15:29 And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: Luk 15:30 But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.**

The elder son wanted a bonus for loyalty. His problem has been hidden but now we see what he is really like. He would not go to his father and speak his mind unless he was provoked. Yet there seems a sense of injustice here because the elder son never walked out on his father. While the younger son was blowing his inheritance, the eldest son was toiling in the fields in the heat of the day. There were no celebrations for him, no parties for his friends, no praise heaped upon his shoulders.

Here is another warning to us. Do we ever get angry that the Lord seems to favour others over us? We may feel of less value because we seem to achieve less than others in the faith, while some for no apparent reason get the attention on the big stage of life. We would want to be those 'big' Christians, those great achievers and it is not for a lack of desire, it just does not happen. Perhaps we

have more empathy with the elder son because we feel our loyalty alone should get recognition. Yet the point the father makes is that, *Luk 15:31 And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.*

There are many lessons here. Do we ever sit and think seriously about that great fact, **‘ever with me’**? It is when we start looking at God’s dealings with others and not ourselves that we get unsettled. *Joh 21:21 Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Joh 21:22 Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me.* Do not get disturbed by God’s dealings with your brothers and sisters, and if they seem advantaged then rejoice with them. More than that, just look to the blessings of your relationship with your heavenly father.

This leads to other lessons. We can serve our brothers rather than complain against them and learn lessons about ourselves. *Gal 6:2 **Bear ye one another's burdens**, and so fulfil the law of Christ. Gal 6:3 For if a man think himself to be something, **when he is nothing**, he deceiveth himself. Gal 6:4 But let every man **prove his own work**, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. Gal 6:5 For every man shall bear his own burden. Gal 6:6 **Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things.***

Firstly, **‘Bear ye one another's burdens’**. We can learn to be sharers of burdens, bearers of burdens, carriers and servants to others. To be able to do this, we must also learn to let other help us. I have met Christians who overburden themselves in all manner of tasks and service and yet refuse to let other help them. How can the body minister to itself in situations where members are isolated?

Secondly let us not practice self-deception and consider ourselves more important than we are, **‘when he is nothing’**. If we are nothing we are nothing. If we think we are something when we are not, we add deceit to the balance.

Thirdly and perhaps to avoid that failing we need to try, to test, to prove what we do, **‘prove his own work’**. You have heard the term ‘proving’ when used of bread making. It is the act of dissolving active dry yeast in water (or another liquid) before incorporating it into dough to ensure that the yeast is alive and kicking, a definition that might have arisen from the need to test yeast and prove that it was active after having been freeze-dried. ‘Proving’ our own work is to look for some life or activity resulting from it.

Fourthly we may learn, **‘Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things’**. If we cannot do the works we can support those who do, as co-workers in the vineyard. Here then is the last word on the story. *Luk 15:31 And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. Luk 15:32 It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.* That older son needed some changes in his life. Do you think that he ever ‘came to himself’?

I would like to think that he did.

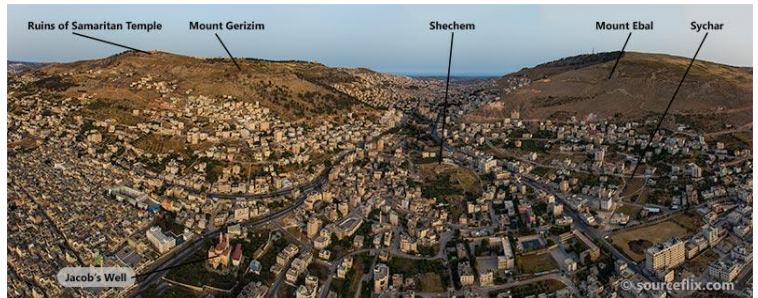
36. Evangeline, the woman at Sychar.

Joh 4:4 And he must needs go through Samaria. Joh 4:5 Then cometh he to a city of Samaria, which is called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Joh 4:6 Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well: and it was about

the sixth hour. Sychar is Shechem and it was located in the tribal land of Manasseh, roughly situated in the middle of the tribal distribution of the Nation of Israel. Today Shechem is known as Nablus.

Before we paint the portrait of our subject today, we must paint the background history of her people. Shechem is steeped in Biblical history. Abraham went there and built an altar. *Gen 12:6 And Abram passed through the land as far as the place of Shechem, to the Oak of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land. Gen 12:7 And Jehovah appeared to Abram and said, I will give this land to your seed. And he built an altar there to Jehovah, who appeared to him.* LITV. It is considered by some that this mount Gerizim in Schechem is Moriah where Abraham went to sacrifice Isaac.

This was the site of an atrocity committed by Jacob's sons killing the male inhabitants. The sons of Jacob perpetrated this atrocity without the permission of their father which was a sign of their lack of respect for their father and his lack of leadership. It was where Joseph went to find his brothers before being sold into slavery and it was the place of Joseph's return and burial. *Jos 24:32 And the bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel brought up out of Egypt, buried they in Shechem, in a parcel of ground which Jacob bought of the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for an hundred pieces of silver: and it became the inheritance of the children of Joseph.* Shechem was the place where Gideon's mother was born and the place where Gideon's wicked son Abimelech conspired to kill the sons of Gideon.



Shechem lies between two mountains, Gerizim and Ebal. The residents of Shechem would have a good view of these mountains and if they were knowledgeable in the scripture they would recall the significance that they held. *Deu 27:3 And thou shalt write upon them all the words of this law, when thou art passed over, that thou mayest go in unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, a land that floweth with milk and honey; as the LORD God of thy fathers hath promised thee. Deu 27:4 Therefore it shall be when ye be gone over Jordan, that ye shall set up these stones, which I command you this day, in mount Ebal, and thou shalt plaister them with plaister..... Jos 8:30 Then Joshua built an altar unto the LORD God of Israel in mount Ebal. Jos 8:31 As Moses the servant of the LORD commanded the children of Israel, as it is written in the book of the law of Moses, an altar of whole stones, over which no man hath lift up any iron: and they offered thereon burnt offerings unto the LORD, and sacrificed peace offerings. Jos 8:32 And he wrote there upon the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he wrote in the presence of the children of Israel.* From Ebal, the testimony of the law issued curses for disobedience and from Gerizim blessings for obedience. The mountains were a daily and stark reminder that God would not tolerate disobedience. Much later, between 300 - 400BC the Samaritans built a temple on Mount Gerizim.

The Samaritans or inhabitants of Samaria were a mongrel race of Israelites mingled with Babylonians. After the captivity we read, *2Ki 17:27 Then the king of Assyria commanded, saying, Carry thither one of the priests whom ye brought from thence; and let them go and dwell there, and let him teach them the manner of the God of the land. 2Ki 17:28 Then one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and dwelt in Bethel, and taught them how they should fear the*

LORD. 2Ki 17:29 Howbeit every nation made gods of their own, and put them in the houses of the high places which the Samaritans had made, every nation in their cities wherein they dwelt.

Gerizim subsequently became the place where the Samaritans would sacrifice their Passover lamb as they do to this very day. It is not difficult to see why they chose this Holy Mountain, with its long history as a place from which blessings proceeded. The Samaritans also had their own version of the law, the Torah, known as the Samaritan Pentateuch. As an ancient Semitic people, the Samaritans still abide by a literal version of Torah law. Eschewing Jewish practices that are rabbinic in origins, they believe only in the Five Books of Moses and observe only holidays found in the Pentateuch, such as Passover and Sukkot, as opposed to Jewish holidays like Purim or Hanukkah whose origins are found elsewhere in Jewish scriptures. Today the modern Jews do not hold a Biblical Passover with a sacrificed lamb, the Samaritans do.

Their rituals mirror an ancient world that few religions still keep today. On Passover, for example, their high priest sacrifices a sheep in a community-wide ritual, where its blood is dabbed on foreheads and later eaten together with matzo and bitter herbs. On Shabbat, Samaritans abstain from cooking and kindling fires and pray barefoot in white, identical garments. Echoing a routine taken straight from the text of Leviticus, Samaritan women moved to their own private homes during menstruation for seven days of isolation. The Samaritan Pentateuch has the same messianic prophecies as the Jewish versions, *Gen 49:10 The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be. Gen 49:11 Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass's colt unto the choice vine; he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes:*

These Samaritans lived in a Biblical landscape. Imagine it when you came out of your home each day, the panorama before you was filled with ancient reminders of your faith. Abraham's sacrifice, Jacob's well, Joseph's tomb and the place where God set the law of Moses on Ebal. You might be forgiven for thinking that Jerusalem would have been the place where all of this should have happened but you would be wrong. At the time Joshua set up the altar and the law, Jerusalem was the stronghold of the Jebusites and it remained unconquered until the time of King David. *Jos 15:63 As for the Jebusites the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the children of Judah could not drive them out: but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Judah at Jerusalem unto this day.* This conquest would be 400 years after Joshua went to Shechem. We must also remember that the Bible is written from a very Judean perspective not a Samaritan perspective.

I labour with this background because we would be entirely wrong to think that our Lord was passing through a town that was totally heathen and devoid of the knowledge of God. The Samaritan's heritage and claims about worshipping at Gerizim rather than Jerusalem had a weight of history in its favour going back to the conquest of Canaan.

So it is that we join our story. *Joh 4:6 Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well: and it was about the sixth hour. Joh 4:7 There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink.....Joh 4:9 Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? **for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.** Joh 4:10 Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water. Joh 4:11 The woman saith unto him,*

*Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water? Joh 4:12 **Art thou greater than our father Jacob**, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle?*

This woman can speak for herself and she does not fear talking to strangers. She is also very much aware of the situation in Israel and the past history of Israel. She is feisty. The question the woman raises is quite natural because she considers herself a descendent of Jacob, “Are you greater than **our father Jacob**?” She is saying that her ancestry is from Jacob, so who is this Jewish stranger who offers ‘living’ water? The scene may remind us of another occasion in scripture, *Gen 24:43 Behold, I stand by the well of water; and it shall come to pass, that when the virgin cometh forth to draw water, and I say to her, Give me, I pray thee, a little water of thy pitcher to drink;*

Here the Great Servant of God, the Messiah stands before her, in an event that will be recorded forever. “Give Me to drink”, asks the One who would give her the water of life. Not the same as the water in the well but water that would quench the soul thirsting after God, the water that would not come from Jacob’s well but from the well that Jesus would open in her and in us.

Our Lord then asks of her husband, her man, since the word (ἄνῆρ = anēr) can mean either man or husband. This woman is much maligned as a serial divorcee or adulteress but we have no idea of her circumstances, whether her husbands had died or just divorced her for a whim. Perhaps she had grown disillusioned with marriage because it had not worked for her so she was content to keep her freedom and freedom of relationships, not that it is an excuse. She may have been living in sin amongst the many other sins that we live in. She is a sinner in need of saving just as we are.

She sees that the man before her, Jesus, is no ordinary man, He is a prophet. He must know where we should worship. Jerusalem or Gerazim? Another revelation is then granted to the woman at the well and it is that worship is not about places, it is about attitudes. Christians should take heed to this statement because there are no sacred places in this sin riddled world other than the heart of a man. You can go to a building and think that because you dedicated it to God, He will somehow come and reside there and bless it. Wrong. The people of God are the Temple of God, *1Co 6:19 What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? 1Co 6:20 For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.* Jesus tells us it must be honest worship out of an honest spirit. It is no longer about physical activities, places, denominations, sacrifices, ‘bells and smells’ as they used to say of high Churches. *Joh 4:24 God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.* If you cannot worship the Creator without the need for physical religious objects, you cannot worship in truth.

The Samaritans are ignorant of the fact that salvation comes out of Judah, out of the Jews, as indeed are many Jews in Jesus day. Yet here in John’s Gospel, to a Samaritan woman, comes the first person to whom Jesus clearly revealed Himself as Messiah and a person who acted on that recognition. *Joh 4:26 Jesus said to her, **I AM!** the One speaking to you. LITV.* Jesus reveals more than the Messiah, He reveals Jehovah. Jesus is like Elijah, who goes to a woman outside of the nation of Israel. *1Ki 17:9 Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee. 1Ki 17:10 So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering of sticks: and he called to her, and said, **Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink.***

Is this because Jesus was not recognised as a prophet in Israel? *Luk 4:24 And he said, Verily I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country. Luk 4:25 But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; Luk 4:26 But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow.*

Jesus revealed the truth about himself to a woman considered unworthy of hearing such truths and incapable of understanding them. He was not limited by the customs of His day but addressed her as an equal with men and a potential sharer in the kingdom. He treated her seriously and responded to her comments. He did not require her to cease being a woman or a Samaritan but viewed her primarily as a person in need of HIM as Messiah.

Is John's narrative to place her deliberately after Jesus' meeting with Nicodemus? Nicodemus comes in fear of the Jews by night. The woman comes in the bright light of the Midday Sun. Nicodemus is a teacher of Israel, she is a despised Samaritan woman. Nicodemus has seen the miracles that Jesus has done, the woman comes having seen nothing, the emphasis being on 'seen'. The woman believes the words of Jesus. There is no record that Nicodemus became a disciple speaking about Jesus, the woman by contrast cannot wait to get back to the village and tell everyone, *Joh 4:29 Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?* How did that happen? It is as if a veil has been pulled from her eyes. One minute she was speaking to a Jewish Rabbi and the next minute He has turned into the Messiah, the anointed of God. It is the miracle of conversion, that it pleased God to reveal Himself to her and not to all of the others that He spoke to. Jesus did not put any embargo on their conversation and say "Tell no man what you have heard". Someone observed that "John has chosen to illustrate the full revelatory process with a simple Samaritan woman rather than a male teacher of Orthodox Judaism".

Now turn to the disciples and hear the Apostles response. *Joh 4:27 And upon this came his disciples, and marvelled that he talked with the woman: yet no man said, What seekest thou? or, Why talkest thou with her?*³³

Culturally, it was taboo for a Jewish man to speak with a woman in public, much less with a Samaritan woman, especially a Samaritan woman who had questionable morals. Some (not all) Jewish leaders taught that it was at best a waste of time to talk with a woman, even with your own wife, and at worst a diversion from the study of the Torah that could possibly lead one to hell. Some rabbis went so far as to suggest that teaching your daughter the Torah was as inappropriate as selling her into prostitution³⁴. To speak with a woman in public, even with your own wife, could lead to gossip and should be avoided. Some Jewish leaders taught that Samaritan women were perpetually unclean³⁵. Thus the disciples were amazed to find Jesus speaking with this Samaritan woman by the well.

I imagine that if the disciples had been at the well first instead of Jesus, the woman would have gone away none the wiser about Jesus the Messiah, because they would not have spoken to her. Yet

³³ <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-24-witnesses-god-uses-john-427-42>

³⁴ D. A. Carson, The Gospel According to John [Eerdmans/Apollos], p.227

³⁵ Colin Kruse, John [IVP], p.137

at the same time, they would not dare question the Master about His actions. What was the disciples' problem? Talking with a Samaritan or talking with a woman? Let us give them the benefit of the doubt since they had women among their company who supported them, that it was talking with the Samaritan that was wrong but even that shows extreme prejudice.

Our Lord's 'opportunistic' evangelism and the woman's actions lead to many Samaritans believing in Jesus. *Joh 4:39 Many Samaritans in that city believed in Jesus because of the woman who said, "He told me everything I've ever done." Joh 4:40 So when the Samaritans went to Jesus, they asked him to stay with them. He stayed in Samaria for two days. Joh 4:41 Many more Samaritans believed because of what Jesus said. Joh 4:42 They told the woman, "Our faith is no longer based on what you've said. We have heard him ourselves, and we know that he really is the saviour of the world." Joh 4:43 After spending two days in Samaria, Jesus left for Galilee. Joh 4:44 Jesus had said that a prophet is not honoured in his own country. GW.*

The woman is so excited to spread her news that she even leaves her water pot at the well. What are we to make of this, a woman spreading the Gospel? Will we become as blinkered as the Apostles? We are all familiar with Paul's words to Timothy and the Corinthian Church, *1Ti 2:11 A woman must learn in silence, in keeping with her position. 1Ti 2:12 I don't allow a woman to teach or to have authority over a man. Instead, she should be quiet. 1Ti 2:13 After all, Adam was formed first, then Eve. GW. 1Co 14:34 Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. 1Co 14:35 And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.*

A strict and literal interpretation of these verses would prohibit the woman from speaking about the Messiah. I do not intend to answer this objection fully now but it will be discussed in more detail in our new series for 2018, DV. What we observe for now is that The Lord has used women and has gone out of His way to use women in the scriptures. Deborah the Judge and prophetess of Israel, Ruth who reminded Boaz of his duty, Hannah who in a manner rebuked Eli for misjudging her grief, The Priest Eli was unable to decipher the difference between a rambling drunk and troubled woman seeking the LORD, but Hannah gently corrected him and opened his eyes to see how God was at work. God's answer to her prayer, her son Samuel, became a great prophet who would anoint David as king. Abigail appealed to David to leave vengeance to God, the Wise Woman of Tekoa who helped David to see that reconciliation was better than banishment for Absalom, the Wise Woman of Abel-Bethmaach who persuaded Joab not to destroy a city because of one evil man, Esther the Queen who was born for such a time as this, to save the Jews from persecution and death.

It is evidently clear that women have spoken when no man spoke and perhaps no man had the courage to speak, *Jdg 4:8 And Barak said unto her, If thou wilt go with me, then I will go: but **if thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go.** Jdg 4:9 And she said, I will surely go with thee: notwithstanding the journey that thou takest **shall not be for thine honour;** for the LORD shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman. And Deborah arose, and went with Barak to Kedesh. We may thank God that the women of the Bible did speak.*

There is here then a well established precedent for women speaking in public about their experience and encounter with Jesus. The woman was obviously a credible witness because people believed her, so we cannot suggest that her background was such that she was viewed as untrustworthy.

People listened to her and because of that went out to establish the truth for themselves. This woman in one encounter with Jesus has been transformed into a wonderful Evangeline, a bearer of good news, a woman with a true story to tell. Let us pray for more like her.

You will have noticed that the woman's story is punctuated with a paragraph about the disciples. It was lunchtime and the disciples offer Jesus food, *Joh 4:31 Meanwhile, the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, have something to eat." Joh 4:32 Jesus told them, "I have food to eat that you don't know about." Joh 4:33 The disciples asked each other, "Did someone bring him something to eat?" Joh 4:34 Jesus told them, "My food is to do what the one who sent me wants me to do and to finish the work he has given me. Joh 4:35 "Don't you say, 'In four more months the harvest will be here'? I'm telling you to look and see that the fields are ready to be harvested. Joh 4:36 The person who harvests the crop is already getting paid. He is gathering grain for eternal life. So the person who plants the grain and the person who harvests it are happy together. Joh 4:37 In this respect the saying is true: 'One person plants, and another person harvests.' Joh 4:38 I have sent you to harvest a crop you have not worked for. Other people have done the hard work, and you have followed them in their work."* GW.

The disciples may have a problem with Samaria and with Samaritans but Samaria is part of the great harvest of the earth. The seed has been sown there and the disciples must reap there but the problem is that they do not have a 'reaper' mentality. They cannot recognise the harvest before them and in that I am sure that they are like us. There is a crop out there that others have planted and that woman Jesus met at Jacobs well is out there reaping away.

Who planted the Samaritan 'fields'? Perhaps it was the ancient labours of the patriarchs? Sometimes we do not see the results of our own ploughing but we should always plant in hope. *1Co 9:10 Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope.* Whether we end up at the reaping stage or not we should always plough in Hope. We have to believe that what we do will have an outcome, even if we do not reap it.

It seems that the Apostle John, who's Gospel has the purpose to reveal life through Christ, has women at the forefront of that revelation. *Joh 20:31 But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.*

- Mary mother of Jesus
- Woman at the well
- Woman taken in adultery
- Mary and Martha at Lazarus funeral
- Mary Magdalene

I will leave that for you to meditate upon. For today we close in the consideration that one of the great evangelists of the Bible was a Samaritan woman whose name was never revealed.

37. We are not alone in the race.

The 11th chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews reminded us of the Older Testament saints and their trials and tribulations as they ran their mortal course. It shows that they all lived their lives by faith. *Heb 11:37 They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; Heb 11:38*

(Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. Heb 11:39 And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: Heb 11:40 God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.

A line is cast between the two Testaments, an umbilical feeding us from the past, a chain between the Old and the New Testaments linking us together, tying us together in that common faith with our people of old, ***“that they without us should not be made perfect”***. It says that those old Saints had not received the promise that they looked for, because this life did not hold it. Like Abraham, they too looked for more, *Heb 11:10 For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God*. That is the great truth of Christianity. This short and uncertain pilgrimage does not lead to the end of life but to the beginning of life eternal. It is the start of our journey towards the eternal life but sadly for others it marks the threshold of Eternal death.

The Epistle to the Hebrews in the 12th chapter reminds us that we believers are not alone in our time or in history. *Heb 12:1 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us. Heb 12:2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

When we read these verses we might skip over the obvious and clear statement that it contains. It is that those people, that great cloud are alive and well. They are not dead and they have not ceased to exist or lose consciousness. Death has not removed their usefulness when they disappeared from earthly view. They still have a glorious work to do. Protestant Christianity makes less of this than the Catholic tradition, that over-extends to them the status of beings to be worshipped. The Eastern Orthodox tradition remembers them in its many icons and reveres their memory.

It is sad if we of the Protestant tradition seem to deliberately overlook them because of our fear of idolatry. I would suggest that we should not constrain our imaginations and develop a Protestant austerity of the mind, because of the fear of becoming idolatrous. Heaven by this can become a drab place, a colourless place with a funereal atmosphere. It is to the contrary a glorious place full of glorified souls.

These saints have left the husks of their mortality behind them and are now glorified. Abel lives, Samson, blinded by the Philistines can now see again, King David smitten with age and infirmity is now in full vigour, Sarah is now free of age and every wrinkle that marred her beauty. These are the immortals in Christ and they wait to welcome us into their company. This great cloud of witnesses, this crowd of martyrs continues to grow. Since these words were penned in the first century their numbers have swelled with the saints of the New Testament and we in turn will join that cloud. That relationship is made possible now because we are joined together by redemption as citizens of Heaven. *Eph 2:6 And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.*

I am not sure whether this has ever occurred to you but you are never alone if you are a Christian. The word 'lonely' does not occur in the New Testament (post resurrection) vocabulary of believers. I am not saying that loneliness does not occur or that there are no lonely people. I do however

suggest that loneliness is a state of mind that is incompatible with the life of a believer. I will further suggest that loneliness may be in part the result of ignorance and self indulgence.

A person who says that they are alone is ignorant of the word of God, that Jesus spoke, *Mat 28:20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you **always** (πάσας τας ημερας), even unto the end of the world. Amen.* The Greek says, “I am with you all the days”. That means that there is not one day that passes when Jesus is not with His sons and daughters. There are no breaks, no holidays where Christ leaves us to fend for ourselves. It would be a wicked and malicious lie for a Christian to say that ‘Christ has left me alone’. The truth is that we leave His presence not that He leaves our presence.

Loneliness is a denial of the presence of Christ in and with a believer. *Col 1:27 To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is **Christ in you**, the hope of glory.* Loneliness is a denial of our position with Christ, *Eph 2:6 And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:* Loneliness is one consequence of the devil trying to isolate us from our heritage and birthright.

Loneliness is also a self inflicted injury that occurs when we neglect the Lord and indulge in our own sinful nature. Poor me! Nobody loves me! I do not have any friends! The world is against me! Loneliness can beget loneliness, for who would want to spend time with such miserable people? You may remember the songs of teenage angst, ‘poor me’, ‘only the lonely’, ‘the tears of a clown when no one’s around’. Unrequited love bearing down upon the selfish soul that cannot get what it wants.

Christ in us will seek out the things that Christ loves. It is a mark of the believer. Christ in us will direct us to the things that will encourage and sustain us and at the forefront of those blessed things is the eternal Word of God. That book will constantly turn our faces to the Face of God and the eternal realities. There are of course those who do not see the importance of that and you will see that these souls become ‘all the lonely people, where do they all come from?’ They come from a place that is far from Christ. The Westminster Shorter Catechism asks Q. What is the chief end of man? A. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever. If you are enjoying God you are not lonely and Christians have been given all things that they might not be lonely.

Do not think that I am suggesting that we shall have no persecution, tears, sorrows, pains, bereavements for we shall. What can make these things more unbearable is the thought that you might be alone. It is like vinegar in a wound, it is no cheer to the sad soul, *Pro 25:20 Singing to someone in deep sorrow is like pouring vinegar in an open cut.* CEV. It makes it more painful but we must be reminded and remind ourselves that it was Jesus who makes life bearable, *Isa 53:4 Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. Isa 53:5 But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.*

Our text in Hebrews Chapter 12 tells us that we are not alone by virtue of another gift of God. *Heb 12:1 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses.* We are surrounded by a group of individuals that we can only call ‘winners’. These are not the failures of religion, these were the ones who survived, got through to the end, not always a pleasant end but they surround us to remind us of what is possible.

Now this raises an interesting question. Is it possible that these old saints now in glory can see us? Are the faithful allowed to watch our progress? Are they in some way there, looking at our struggles and trials? Now I am not putting forward or encouraging the idea of praying to dead saints, enquiring of the dead or supporting the Roman Catholic ideas concerning the dead. I am asking a reasonable question because the passage before us offers more comfort if they are actually present, because it has more resonance if it is a reality.

The idea that we are being watched by the spirits is not an unbiblical concept. Take the angels, the messengers of God, do they watch us? *Heb 1:13 But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool? Heb 1:14 Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?* Angels have to be there to minister, they have to be present.

Way back in the OT we have the story of Balaam's ass that saw an angel when the prophet did not. Because the unseen is withheld from our sense does not mean that it is not present. Elisha's servant could only see the host of Assyria but Elisha could see the host of heaven also, *2Ki 6:16 And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. 2Ki 6:17 And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.*

Paul tells us that the Angels are present in worship, else this verse makes no sense. *1Co 11:10 For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels.* If there are no angels present the argument falls apart.

Angels are not privy to all of the Creator's plans. They are curious of progress, *1Pe 1:12 Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.* How could the angels rejoice if they could not see the sinner repent? *Luk 15:7 I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.*

If the angels see us, why not the departed saints? Does this cloud of witnesses cheer us on to the finishing line? They should cheer us up and they should cheer us on. Do they as a cloud embrace us and surround us, of course they do? Why not, but do not get led away to dream too much on this? Our focus must be firmly on Christ.

Our passages teach us that Faith suffers and finally conquers and at last we are completely transformed. In that great cloud of witnesses are saints who could have done better. For example, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, all encountered problems in their walk with the Lord. I am sure that we latter day hypocrites think that we are wiser and live better lives than they did, because we have that remarkable facility of amnesia. We conveniently forget or lessen our personal sins. It is why repentance is a hard creature to find because we seldom think we are bad enough to need its company. We mortals fail because sin lies in our members and that is why the flesh must die and we must die. To every son of Adam who says that he is not a sinner, his last breath, his final gasp in life is a testimony of that fact that he is a sinner – because he dies.

Some of these ancient saints, like us, could have done better but are none the less in that great cloud. They were at last transformed, fully redeemed, made sinless but above all made an example of God's grace and mercy to those who would follow. The surrounding cloud is not separated from us but we are in the middle of that cloud, we are enclosed in that cloud. Those that we read of in a manner surround us, encompass us and perhaps still run with us, because the cloud surrounds us.

We learn more and that is we are in a race. It is a contest and the Greek word 'agon' (ἀγών) comes down to our language as the word agony. It is a hard race not a stroll. As we run, not saunter in this race, we take the cloud with us. Again, I am sure that many Christians do not see the life in Christ as a struggle and a race. They probably think that Christ did everything for them so that all that is left, is just have to live out their existence and the race is finished. They do not think that a further transformation, further effort is required to reach the finishing line. They are wrong.

Heb 12:1 let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us..... To help our race we cast aside weights and sins. This makes clear to us that not only are we in a race but that our race can be hindered. We might say that it is an obstacle race. Satan hinders our transformation, *1Th_2:18 Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us.* We also hinder ourselves as our sins hinder us. If you were cast into the ocean you would make every attempt to cast off anything that would drag you down. It would be a matter of urgency and that is how our lives should be in the sea of life.

We are told those obstacles are twofold. There are 'weights' and 'sins'. There are the unnecessary burdens that we lade ourselves with and the sins that weaken our lives. These twofold obstacles are I suggest are things which are **external** to our lives and the things which are **internal** in our lives. The burdens are external and the sins and internal. The rich imagery of the verse paints two picture of the life of a saint. We have seen on the one hand a cloud of witnesses encompassing us to encourage us and on the other hand we see the 'weights and sins' that encompass us and discourage us. It is hard to float in a cloud when laden with weights of our own making.

Well, what burdens might affect our lives? They are the things which are utterly useless to our new lives of faith. They are things that are not simply neutral, innocuous, they are things which are positively destructive of our new life. They may steal our time from service, they may distract our minds from important issues.

I am not sure how familiar you are with Isaac Watts but as a small boy, Watts had a great interest in versifying. Once, during family prayers, he began to laugh. His father asked him why. He replied that he had heard a sound and opened his eyes to see a mouse climbing a rope in a corner, and had immediately thought,

A little mouse for want of stairs
Ran up a rope to say its prayers.

His father considered this irreverent, and proceeded to administer corporal punishment, in the midst of which Isaac called out,

Father, father, mercy take,
And I will no more verses make.

When he was older, he complained of the bad quality of writing in the metrical Psalters of his day. His father promptly challenged him to do better, and he undertook the effort. During his lifetime he wrote about 600 hymns altogether, but most of his best efforts were turned out between his graduation from school when he was 20 and his taking a job teaching when he was 22. During these two Golden Years, hymns poured from his pen with the impetus of true genius. Isaac turned something that might have ended up as a frivolous occupation into something that enhanced his Christian ministry. A weight was turned into an engine. He wrote:

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ my God!
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.

I am not going to make a list of vanities for you to burn on your bonfire, which is your task if you are interested. It is up to you to see what things are hindering your life and deal with them. I must do the same. I am not even going to suggest that they are always sinful activities. They may be quite pleasant and enjoyable things that pass the 'time of our sojourning' in trivial pursuits but that is not the point. *1Pe 1:17 And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear:* We need to respect the time that we have and use it well.

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews identifies a problem that you and I have to solve, likewise with the sins. They must be dealt with. If we know that you have a sickness, a disease, a cancer, we have two options. We can deal with it or we can hide from it and believe it does not exist. In this life most people choose to get treatment because they know that the longer you leave something the worse it becomes. The same is true of sin and perhaps that is why it seems few old people get saved. I have never in my years seen anyone over 60 years of age come to Christ (I am not saying it is not possible) it just seems harder. Sin holds them too firmly. *Ecc 12:1 Remember your Creator when you are young, before the days of trouble come and the years catch up with you. They will make you say, "I have found no pleasure in them."*

I find it strange but not unbelievable that when it comes to personal sins, things that we know offend God, things that we do that break His rules, we are slow to seek treatment, if we seek it at all. We tend to live with our sins and accommodate them while excusing them. We try to change their identity and instead of seeing them as sins, we make them an illness. We see them as something that we have to endure rather than cure. We would rather live with them than be transformed and live without them.

It is what the writer of the Hebrews calls the deceitfulness of sin. *Heb 3:12 Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. Heb 3:13 But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. Heb 3:14 For we **are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end;*** Because these sins that hinder us are known mostly to ourselves because

they are internal, we can hide them but they must be dealt with. It is part of the process that we call sanctification, the making of the Saint.

How then should we proceed? It is quite simply to keep our eyes towards Christ. *Heb 12:2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. Heb 12:3 For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, **lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.***

It is easy to be discouraged in this life. I must say that for me the most discouraging people have been those who claimed to be 'christians' but are clearly not. I have not been troubled by the unbeliever. We are however not alone if this happens to us, because our Lord suffered it too. His worst enemies were from the religious establishment rather than from rank unbelievers. On reflection, I do not find that Jesus has any interactions with people that we might call 'atheists'. People did not engage Him over the existence of God but they do engage Him over the way God said things should be done.

Of course there were plenty of fools in Jesus day as now, *Psa 53:1 The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. Corrupt are they, and have done abominable iniquity: there is none that doeth good.* Yet the point I am making is that it was the religious elite, the Scribes, the Priests, the Pharisees who were the real enemies of the Gospel and their modern equivalents are just the same. The people that poison the wells of salvation are alive and well then as for now. They are people in ministries, leading people along the road to hell, because they have rejected Christ and perverted the Truth.

Seeing that we know this, we are forewarned and forearmed. The future joy that was set before Christ sustains us and is the power to endure and to look beyond the present valley of the shadow. We should be looking ahead but more than that, keeping our eyes firmly on the 'author and completer' of our faith.

38. Why no transformations?

Today as we move to conclude this series, I want to consider why it is that we do not see those transformations in many people's lives that we have seen in our studies of Bible characters over the past year. Why it is that so called 'Christians' today bear little or no resemblance to their New Testament counterparts, why do they lack the enthusiasm and desire for Christ in their lives and why there is little to distinguish them from the unbelievers? Why is it that when Jesus is the Transformer, people who claim to know Him are not transformed? We shall make some suggestions.

I was struck by a verse in our recent ministry on the woman at the well. *Joh 4:6 Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, **being wearied with his journey**, sat thus on the well: and it was about the sixth hour.* It was the word 'tired' or 'laboured' that struck me. It is a clear statement of the fact that Jesus was tired, laboured, worn out with the journey, perhaps because He had been walking since first light and now it was the heat of the day. Our Lord suffered the fatigue that is common to humanity and we can feel for him in His weariness. We see Him clearly as one of us.

It is perhaps one of our most mistaken ideas of the Lord, He being God incarnate, that the Incarnation constituent does not endure the same suffering as other humans, because His Divinity

constituent overrides all the difficulties of human existence. In other words, there is an idea that Jesus does not get tired, get hungry, sleep as we do, get aches and pains, go to the toilet, get blisters, grow old, get wrinkles and feel all of the emotions that we do.

For some, Jesus is always portrayed in clean white linen, perfectly ironed by the angels, sweet smelling, without one blot of the muddy highways and byways being able to stick to it, because it is divinely coated in heavenly Teflon. We would not think for a moment that Jesus ever smelled of sweat from His journeys, or of fish from his trips on Galilee with the disciples, or the stink of the houses of the sick that He visited. He stands sanitised, like a perfumed statue, just as He is idolised in the modern houses of incense where people falsely worship His image. Out of place in the world of men, but this is not the Jesus of the Bible.

There is a view of Jesus that rather than draw Him to us, elevates Him away from us and makes Him less approachable. That was certainly not the case in His days on earth and He was both approachable and touchable. I fear that we may have lost the reality of His humanity.

There is something else that we must understand about our Lord and that is, His life on earth did not come pre-loaded with all of the experiences of humanity. *Luk 2:40 And **the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom:** and the grace of God was upon him..... Luk 2:52 And Jesus **increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.*** These verses have been used to suggest that Jesus increased in "knowledge" but that is not what the verses say. It says that He increased in "wisdom" and wisdom is applied knowledge, wisdom begets knowledge. Wisdom and knowledge are different. Solomon's wisdom, a gift from God, was used to comment on the creation and discern judgements. *1Ki 4:33 And he spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes. 1Ki 4:34 And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom.*

If knowledge is viewed as information, Jesus acquired information as we do. Our Saviour grew as we grow, through all the changing scenes of life and it was one of the self-limitations of God, in order to display His perfect humanity. Jesus the baby had all the limitations and feelings that a baby has. The discomforts the emotions, the pleasures were all the same to Him. He grew as child, a boy and a man. One day his facial hair began to grow, He went through puberty, His voice became deeper, and He became physically stronger. He endured the complete 'human experience', all the emotions that can be experienced were His but His without sinning. It is important to reflect upon this in case we distance ourselves from Him by thinking that our humanity is superior to His. It is not.

The many temptations that beset us, beset him, consequently, *Heb 2:18 for in that he suffered, himself being tempted, **he is able to help those who are tempted.*** YLT.....*Heb 4:15 We have a chief priest **who is able to sympathize** with our weaknesses. He was tempted in every way that we are, but he didn't sin.* GW. These powerful statements mean that a person who claims to be a 'Christian' can never say to God that "you have no idea what I am going through and no idea what I am suffering". No human suffering is beyond the scope of Christ's suffering and temptation. Neither can you demand why has God put me through this suffering, because His sons suffer!

Jesus gave up everything to become one of us, *2Co 8:9 For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, **that ye through his poverty***

might be rich. All of His suffering that enables Jesus to be sympathetic to our situation, was for the purpose of enriching us. In a manner of speaking, he shed His Divine wealth to become a pauper in order to bless us. How clearly and beautifully Charles Wesley saw this:

Mild He lays His glory by
Born that man no more may die
Born to raise the sons of earth
Born to give them second birth

The word Paul used for riches is mostly used of temporal riches, human wealth but it also refers to spiritual riches in the life of a believer. *Eph 2:6 And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: Eph 2:7 That in the ages to come he might shew **the exceeding riches of his grace** in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.*

It seems to me, when I look at Christianity in my generation, that people think that they do God a favour by accepting the 'exceeding riches of His grace'. There is a 'take it or leave it' attitude because these things do not excite their soul. It is just not that important and there is a certain reluctance to lay hold of these riches because they do not have the value of that 'pearl of great price'. *Mat 13:45 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Mat 13:46 Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.* It is as if there is so little value in the things of Christ, the riches of His grace, that they are not worth the effort to possess them. The other things in life hold more sway and more interest.

The consequences are quite obvious. If these persons are believers in the first place, which I question, they have little or no understanding of the life of a disciple. Further, they will experience a troubled life because Christ is not central to all that they do. They are people who will not be transformed by Christ because they do not want Him at the centre of their lives. Of course they want their religion, their church visits, their ceremonies, their festivals and the paraphernalia of hypocrisy but not the 'author of our salvation'. These souls have not undergone that first transformation of repentance and faith towards God.

If a person has been convicted of sin, repented and received forgiveness at the hand of Christ, it is a very real and profound personal experience. There will be an individual story to accompany it, a personal testimony of saving grace. If a person cannot find a testimony to these things they are unsaved. It is easily tested. Every redeemed child of God has a personal testimony of that initial encounter and transformation. If you ask someone for their testimony and they blather about and obfuscate, they do not have one. In fact we are wrong to encourage a person to think that they are in Christ when they are not and we should again direct them to the 'starting' line, back to the cross.

What would you say of a person invited to a meeting at a palace by a Monarch in order to receive a great honour, perhaps a knighthood and then when asked about that visit they would not be able to give an account of what happened to them? People might be quite right to assume that they had not bothered to attend and that they had never seen the King. Or what if you had been offered tickets to go on a very special holiday to a beautiful country and all expenses paid so that you could enjoy its pleasures. What if, when asked how the holiday went, what you saw, what you experienced and so forth, there was nothing you could say about it? It appeared that you had no recollection of it?

People might be right to assume that you never had such a holiday since you have no recall of it. In a like manner, what are you to make of a person who says that they have met the King of Kings, fallen at His feet, been forgiven and rising into a new life, but have no recollection of it, would you be wrong to assumed that it had never happened? You would not. So it is with people without a testimony.

There is something fundamentally wrong in the churches today concerning the experience of personal salvation and what people think it is and what should happen to them. Is it one of the reasons that there are so many 'christian' counsellors in the churches today? That it has taken 2000 years to realise that the problems that people face must be brought to light and treated primarily by another human being rather than directly through Christ? That it has become necessary to have a new breed of intercessors, mediators, a new priesthood, before we can have our problems sorted out? Why is it that the person with the problem cannot draw on 'the exceeding riches of His grace'? Is it so, that Jesus is completely unable to transform our lives and solve our problems without the need or indeed interference of another human being? Of course not.

We also need to make a clear distinction between our relationship to Christ as a body of 'believers', our corporate relationship and our personal relationship with Jesus. At a corporate level, some call it 'being in church', we can be lulled into a false worship and false life by assuming that it is all that is required of us. Singing about 'blessed assurance Jesus is mine' while making no effort to clear the sin and rubbish out of our lives is self-deceit. You cannot have assurance while clinging to sin. Can we sing 'what a friend we have in Jesus' not just in a meeting but also when outside of a meeting, if He is nowhere to be found in our lives? And never sing this one again if it is not true in your life:

In Christ alone my hope is found,
He is my light, my strength, my song;
This Cornerstone, this solid Ground,
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.

So I ask, if He is 'Christ alone' to us, why are we scratching around life like John Bunyan's 'Man with the muckrake' and seeking help to problems elsewhere. I am reminded of a meeting I attended in Maidenhead many years ago. It was supposed to be a healing meeting and an old Indian gentleman went to the front on his crutches and after much shouting and singing, he was persuaded to throw away his crutches and walk. Well, there was a lot of jumping about and rejoicing so that he was lost in the melee. I remember watching him as he shuffled over to his crutches, picked them up, put them under his arms and hobbled away. Christ had done nothing because the man had not gone to Him alone.

I think it is true of many people who try to engage in corporate worship, that they do not get much out of it and they go away with all of the problems that they brought to the meeting. What is missing and it is the case with probably 99% of worship today, is that the people who attend have nothing and bring nothing to share even if the opportunity to share exists. They are like people who go to a party and bring nothing and contribute nothing. This is generally so because they live lives of spiritual poverty. They come to draw from others and I am not saying this is wrong but when it develops into a lifestyle it becomes parasitic. It sucks the life out of others because there is not life in them. There are no rivers of living water springing out of their souls.

This scripture is not only true, it is a promise to every single Christian, *Joh 7:38 He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.* If you do not accept this truth, here is another hymn that you can stop singing:

Let Your living water flow over my soul,
Let your Holy Spirit come and take control,
Of every situation that has troubled my mind,
All my cares and burdens on to you I roll.

If you are going to give and get the best out of corporate worship, it is essential to develop personal worship and this is at the heart of most personal problems. The answer to our problems I think, lies in the fact that there is no deep personal relationship with the Saviour. Indeed most of the answers to our problems can be found in the scripture without going out of our way to even bother Our Lord. The lazy person expects the Lord to work miracles to avoid them having to do anything, yet the word of God itself can work transformations in our lives.

I will give one example to make my point but there are many. Take the subject of **anxiety**. There are the constant worriers, those for whom every corner of life hides a spider. Why is it we are 'careful' of these things? If there is nothing that you can do about it there is no point in worrying about it. Jesus made it quite clear, *Mat 6:31 Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? Mat 6:32 (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. Mat 6:33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.* The antidote to anxiety is here given. **Focus elsewhere**, look to something higher and better. Stop being a selfish, self absorbed, self centred moaner. Put the kingdom of God first and everything else will fall into place. That is how we should start each day.

And what about all of those things that you could not do today and that are left over for tomorrow, the cares that will haunt your night. *Mat 6:34 Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.* Jesus says today is bad enough without worrying about tomorrow, just deal with today and commit the future to Jesus.

Anxiety is dealt with best while facing the Lord, not facing the problem. As someone quipped, do not think how big your problems are but tell your problems how big your God is. *Php 4:6 Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. Php 4:7 And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.* If we give our problems over to 'prayer and thanksgiving' the Lord 'will guard our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus'.

If you are still carrying your cares on your back, you had better add this hymn to your list of 'do not sing':

Turn you eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face;
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim

In the light of His glory and grace.

We sing about the transformations that Jesus can do but we do not let Him do them. Why is it that people who call themselves 'christians' undergo so little transformation? Firstly, we have a 'human nature' that is corrupt and we have lived with it so long that it became a comfortable companion. It became normal because we awake with it, we put it on like a garment and we wear it in our daily lives. We never question the possibility that there was anything wrong with us. This is the hard part. How will we ever come to realise what we are in the sight of God unless He shows us?

How will we change unless we have a relationship with Him who knows our hearts? How can we be transformed and obtain those virtues required of us without having a relationship with Christ? It is impossible to produce the 'Fruit of the Spirit' without a close relationship, so close in fact that it is flesh on flesh. Spurgeon observes:

Why doth that branch bring forth grapes? Simply because it has been engrafted into the vine, and therefore it partakes of the nature of the stem. So, Christian, the only way whereby thou canst bring forth fruit to God is by being grafted into Christ and united with him..... and

The church is a vital body, and to add to a vitalized body requires a divine operation. The church is like a tree; if you want to add to a tree you cannot take a dead branch and tie it on, that is not adding to it, but hindering it. To add to a tree there must be some grafting done, which requires skill, and the branch, itself alive, must be knit to the living trunk by a living bond, so that the vital sap of the tree will flow into the grafted branch. A true church is a living entity, and only living men and women made alive by the Spirit of God are fit to be grafted into it, and the grafting must be done by the Lord himself, otherwise it is no true addition to the church of the Living God. Some members are only tied on to the church, and they are neither useful nor an enhancement, just as a dead branch fastened to a tree would add no beauty to it, and would certainly bear no fruit. There must be a living union, so that the life which is in the church will join with the life that is in the man or the woman, and the one life of the one living Spirit will flow through the whole of the body.

Unfortunately, I think that it often happens that our children who make a well meaning profession of faith, but end up like those twigs, those branches tied to the tree but never grafted in. When people do not want Christ close to them, do not want to talk of Him and show little knowledge of Him then we are looking at a life that has no relationship with Christ. That is the reality.

The day of disappointment will dawn when Kings and Queens, Popes and Bishops, pastors and prophets, the ordinary citizen who thought that they served the Lord of the Universe will hear those frightening words, "Go away, I never knew you". *Mat 7:21 Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Mat 7:22 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? Mat 7:23 And then will I profess unto them, **I never knew you**: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.*

If we think that we know the Lord, it is yet more important that He knows us. How would you know whether the Lord knows you? *1Jn 4:13 Hereby **know we** that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.* There are of course many more proofs of our relationship and many are to be found in the first Epistle of John. *1Jn 3:24 And he that keepeth his commandments **dwelleth in him, and he in him.** And hereby **we know** that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.....1Jn 3:14 **We know** that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.....1Jn_5:20 And **we know** that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.*

When 'christianity' does not appear to be working as it should, the relationship with Christ appears false and insincere, when there is no personal testimony of saving grace, when there is no deep love for the Saviour, when the love for God's people is absent, where the word of God holds no sway over the life, where ignorance of the things of God is acceptable and normal, where communion with Christ remains a mystery, where spiritual fruit never grows, we may conclude one thing. Christ is not present.

That of course does not mean that there will be no followers of Jesus, church goers, religious people, it is just that they will be doing it all without Christ in their lives. The consequence of this is that these persons will have a hard heart, a legalistic mind and a Pharisaic attitude. This all comes about because the Holy Spirit is not in them.

39. All Good things come to a beginning.

It is appropriate at the end of another year and the end of another series of studies, that we focus our minds on the reality, that we are a year closer to home. In the final study in this series on Jesus the Transformer, I want to look at that final transformation that occurs through death. 'All good things come to a beginning' for us, a new beginning and if you have lived and loved in this life, as a Christian, death is not the end, it is the beginning. I want to examine how we should approach death, the dying process, what happens when we arrive in glory and life in the everlasting.

In his sermon 'Home before dark', Vance Havner observed,

When I started out as a boy preaching, Father went along. Then when I got old enough to go by myself, he'd meet me at the little railroad station in Newton, North Carolina. I can see him standing there by that old Ford roadster, in that old blue serge suit that hadn't been pressed since the day he bought it. When I'd go up to him, the first thing he'd ask me would be, "How did you get along?" It's been a long time, and when my train rounds into Grand Central Station in glory, I think he'll be there--not in the old blue serge suit, but in the robes of glory. I wouldn't be surprised if the first thing he'd say would be, "How did you get along?" I think I'll say, "Pretty well, and I owe a lot to you for it." Then I think I'd say, "You remember back in the country when I was a little boy, no matter where I was in the afternoon I was supposed to be back by sundown. It's been a long trip Dad, but here I am by the grace of God, home before dark."

Preparing for death is something that never crosses our minds. We perhaps see death ahead but do not consider that there is much we can do about the inevitable, yet the preparation for death begins

at the start of our life, not on our death bed. There is to some extent a control over the way that we approach death, *Gen 49:33 And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people. Jacob set all his house in order, said what needed to be said and positioned himself for the Transformation. He was not taken by surprise.*

When Dr Martin Lloyd Jones realised his cancer was terminal he began to prepare for death³⁶:

It is the utmost moral and spiritual insanity to be living, but never preparing to die, never preparing for death in any way. To neglect preparation for death is like nearing a certain planned date of a long-awaited international trip, only to find that when the day and hour of departure arrives, both you and those around you realize that you have not packed anything for the trip, nothing at all. Going on such a journey without even one piece of luggage, no credit card, no cash, no traveller's checks, nothing, not even a change of underwear or socks. Who would do it? Many people do it every single day.

People begin a journey of dying and then death, for which they have not at all prepared for. Coming to the end of this life and then dying IS that journey. The most foolish thing imaginable in this life is to come to the time ill-prepared or totally unprepared.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones believed this deeply and he often preached about it. But it is one thing to preach about it and another thing altogether to practice it. Lloyd-Jones not only preached it, but practiced it as well, as the record shows. It was at the end of his life, when battling cancer that he knew it was time to give his remaining time, not to further books or writing, but to prepare to die.

Iain Murray, Dr. Lloyd-Jones' biographer, visited with MLJ a year before he died, in March, 1980, and an autobiography was discussed. But Lloyd-Jones decided against it for a primary reason. "It had to do with his final assessment of the right use of such time as remained to him. . . . it came home to him with much conviction that time to prepare for death was very important; he needed such time and believed that its right use was now his chief work as a Christian. What was uppermost in his thoughts did not lie in the past at all. The big thing before him was that all Christians need a pause from the activities of life in order to prepare for heaven." In expressing this to Mr. Murray, Lloyd-Jones, referring to words of Thomas Chalmers, spoke about his condition:

"I am grateful to God that I have been given this time [the time to face death and prepare for it]. I agree with Chalmers absolutely. We do not give enough time to death and to our going on. It is a very strange thing—this one certainty [death]—yet we do not think about it. We are too busy. We allow life and its circumstances to so occupy us that we do not stop and think . . . people say about sudden death, 'It is a wonderful way to go'. I have come to the conclusion that it is quite wrong. I think the way we go out of this

³⁶ <https://www.providencedenton.org/589.martyn-lloyd-jones-prepared-for-death/>

world is very important and this is my great desire now, that I may perhaps be enabled to bear a greater testimony than ever before.

John Wesley was far less introspective:

John Wesley was once asked: "If you knew you would die at 12 o'clock tomorrow night, how would you spend the intervening time?" "Why," he said, "I would spend it just as I intend to spend it. I would preach tonight at Gloucester, and again tomorrow evening. I would then repair to my friend's house as he expects me. I would converse and pray with the family, retire to my room about 10 o'clock, commend myself to my heavenly Father, lie down to sleep, and wake up in glory."

Wesley of course did believe that "Methodists die well" and he was living the heavenly life, so there were no surprises awaiting him. The evangelist, George Whitefield, lived close to God also. The day after he fell asleep, John Wesley was timidly approached by one of the godly band of Christian sisters who had been brought under his influences and who loved both Whitefield and himself:

"' Dear Mr. Wesley, may I ask you a question?' "' Yes, of course, madam, by all means.' "' But, dear Mr. Wesley, I am very much afraid what the answer will be.' "' Well, madam, let me hear your question, and then you will know my reply.' "At last, after not a little hesitation, the inquirer tremblingly asked, ' Dear Mr. Wesley, do you expect to see dear Mr. Whitefield in heaven?'

"A lengthy pause followed, after which John Wesley replied with great seriousness, 'No, madam.' "His inquirer at once exclaimed, 'Ah, I was afraid you would say so.' "To which John Wesley added, with intense earnestness, 'Do not misunderstand me, madam; George Whitefield was so bright a star in the firmament of God's glory, and will stand so near the throne, that one like me, who am less than the least, will never catch a glimpse of him.'"

I am not in full agreement with Lloyd Jones, because what if he had been taken suddenly, then there would have been no time to prepare, hence we should always be prepared to die as our Lord has told us, *Mat 24:42 Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. Mat 24:43 But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Mat 24:44 Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.*

Whatever your approach, I cannot but agree with Charles Hodge who said, "It is important that when we come to die we have nothing to do but to die".

The necessity of death is such that sin can work its final part of the curse of Adam and return us to the dust. Not that it is the end of the story, for death is like the sowing of a seed, as our Lord said, *Joh 12:24 Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. Joh 12:25 He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. Joh 12:26 If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father*

honour. What comes out of that seed in death is far more glorious, 1Co 15:37 And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain: 1Co 15:38 But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body.

If only we could view the passing of the Saint as the triumph of life in Christ, the pain would not soften but it would be more bearable. Yet we must go through that gate and none escape it.

The dying process is one which confuses many people. There are those who say that it is the end of all consciousness and existence and that of course that is the hope of the wicked man. He does not want to think of or face his maker. There are some views that suggest that the soul falls asleep. The Jehovah's Witnesses believe we cease to exist and the Seventh Day Adventists hold we are unconscious. Quote: Soul sleep SDA Fundamental belief 26, "Until that day death is an unconscious state for all people. When Christ, who is our life, appears, the resurrected righteous and the living righteous will be glorified and caught up to meet their Lord".

One of the key verses used to 'prove' this is *Ecc 9:5 For the living know that they shall die: **but the dead know not any thing**, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten.* I suggest that Ecclesiastes is a book of wisdom that views life from this side of the grave, from under the heaven. It looks at life as vanity, a puff of smoke, and it sees the corpse as a lifeless object that cannot communicate with the living, hence the dead know nothing. *1Th 4:13 But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. 1Th 4:14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.* The 'sleepers' are 'in' and 'with' Jesus, not in the ground. The question is, are they conscious?

Sleep is a euphemism, a gentler expression, to help us come to terms with death. *Joh 11:11 These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, **Our friend Lazarus sleepeth**; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep. Joh 11:12 Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well. Joh 11:13 Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep. Joh 11:14 Then **said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead.*** I think that the Bible uses language appropriate to where we are standing. If we are on this earthly side of the grave we view the person as sleeping. If we are on the other side we look back fully conscious at a corpse. If the person had ceased to exist or had been annihilated why did Jesus use the term 'sleep', it is pointless? Dead is dead, Lazarus is dead, Lazarus does not exist any more, but that is not what our Lord said.

Against that view of unconsciousness, we have the story of the rich man and Lazarus (it does not say it is a parable) and in it the transition from this life to the next is one of total consciousness. *Luk 16:22 And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; Luk 16:23 And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.* It is a further reminder to us that what we see is only part of reality. As the corpse rattles into the grave and the mourners stand by in grief, the future of the dead has already been determined. There are only two outcomes and no middle ground.

Luke uses an expression familiar to the Jews of his day to describe the comfort of heaven, 'Abraham's bosom'. The poor man is in 'Abraham's bosom'. Paul describes the believer as 'Abraham's seed', *Gal 3:29 And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise*. So rather than Peter, it is Abraham who welcomes his 'poor seed', the beggar Lazarus to glory. Lazarus even gets a heavenly chauffeur to take him home. It is a different story for the rich man. No sooner have his eyes closed in death than they open again in a place of torment. Literally in the blink of an eye, the rich man is in a different place and that, a place of suffering.

How you ask can a loving God inflict suffering? How I ask can a man who rejects the Saviour expect anything less? He takes his suffering with him from this life to the next and it is with him forever. He has it because he did not let Christ deal with the cause of it. It may seem quiet at the graveside of the dead unbeliever but that person has departed to a Christless place, and they are already in the grip of suffering. It seems to me that funerals are for the most part a great deception.

If as the rich man requested, his relatives could see his plight they would have repented. And that is just the point. It is by this time too late to do anything about it, despite the fact that all through his life, the scriptures had been as plain as the hand in front of his face and he did nothing about it. He spent a life of deliberate ignorance and unbelief.

From the other side of life sometimes called the 'intermediate state', the state between death and the resurrection of the dead, the Saints gather in eternity. We meet up with that great Cloud of witnesses, not a great cloud of corpses. *Heb 12:22 But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, Heb 12:23 To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, Heb 12:24 And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.*

In life we are already seated in the heavenlies in Christ, in death we pass into the fullness of that heavenly life. Stephen saw it clearly as he approached death. *Act 7:55 But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.* The penitent thief would be with Christ 'Today', when he died, which is not much comfort if it were a lie. Enoch passed over fully conscious, *Heb 11:5 By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.* Enoch went from life to life, because, *Joh 11:26 And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this? Well, do you believe it?*

It is not my purpose here to do a detailed study of the body, soul and spirit and what happens at death. Simply stated it is the separation of what I will call 'me' from my earthly body. The chemical components of me revert to the dust and the shell, the platform, the scaffold that carried me through life is no longer occupied. *Gen 2:7 And Jehovah God formed the man out of dust from the ground, and blew into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.* From a collection of chemicals, the soul became the living soul by the breath of God. The Nephesh, the soul, was brought to life by the Creator and it will die in due season. *Ecc 12:7 Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.*

What leaves my body, is I suggest, all that identified me as me. My essence, my psyche (soul), my spirit, my memories, my personality, my knowledge and my relationship with my Saviour all remain intact, indissoluble. It seems then that our bodies here in life constrain our essential being in both space and time, that is the eternal soul is linked to the body until death. The body is an essential scaffolding for the development of the eternal soul but we are tied into our body until death. At death we emerge from our chrysalis like a butterfly. We in life are subject to many things that are unessential and non-essential to the life to come. We get tired and need sleep, we hunger and we need food, we have sorrow and we cry, we have pain, we have sickness, we age and decay all of which affect our life here and mould what we have become but they are all discarded in death.

Here is the change. *Rev 7:16 They shall **hunger no more**, neither **thirst any more**; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. Rev 7:17 For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes..... Rev 21:4 and God shall wipe away **every tear** from their eyes, and the death shall not be any more, nor **sorrow**, nor **crying**, nor shall there be any more **pain**, because the first things did go away.' YLT..... Rev 22:5 And there shall be **no night** there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever.* You can see that there are bodily functions that are no longer needed when we become immortal in Christ. I do not think that we shall ever need to sleep again, in the eternal light, so why we should enter eternity asleep rather than awake makes no sense. Our present bodies in some measures severely handicap us.

I further believe that we move out of this temporal, time controlled universe into a realm without time as we know it. *Tit 1:2 In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began (πρὸ χρόνων αἰώνων).* God's promises were before the 'ages of time', outside of what we know as time. We shall be subject to a whole new range of laws in a New Heavens and a New Earth. Yet we shall still in some way be recognisable, as were Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration. *1Co 13:12 For now we see through a mirror in dimness, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I will fully know even as I also was fully known.* YLT.

Having not yet experienced it, I am in no position other than to speculate as to how it all happens out of time. I have no idea how the dead will be raised while at the same time coming in glory with Christ. I have no idea about the metaphysics of eternity. What I do know is that when I go, I shall be going home. *2Co 5:8 even we are fully assured, and think it good rather to go away from home out of the body, and to come home to the Lord.* LITV. What a beautiful way to put it. Here we are looking at this life as if it is the most important thing of all, rather than looking to go to our real home.

The 'faith walker' will always be looking to this new home, *2Co 5:6 Then always being fully assured, and knowing that being at home in the body we are away from home from the Lord 2Co 5:7 (for we walk by faith, not by sight). 2Co 5:1 For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. 2Co 5:2 For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: Do we really sigh and groan for this?*

Finally **The New Heavens** will finally arrive. *2Pe 3:10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. 2Pe 3:11 Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, 2Pe 3:12 Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein **the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?** 2Pe 3:13 Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.*

Just as our physical bodies are unserviceable for eternity, so is the present universe. Our old bodies or what remains of them will eventually be cremated in that final holocaust. And that is just about where the Bible ends, with the New Creation.

Rev 21:5 And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. Rev 21:6 And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. Rev 21:7 He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. Rev 21:8 But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

AMEN
